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BEACONSFIELD

IN SOCIETY—IN PARLIAMENT—
IN LITERATURE

BY
GEORGE MAKEPEACE TOWLE

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BEACONSFIELD.

I.

"Mr. Disraeli," says a caustic English writer, "has earned a place in history. To meet him in the long roll of English prime-ministers is a perpetual surprise, like that of encountering Saul among the prophets. His premiership will be one of the standing jokes of history, as amusing to future students of the Victorian era as to us, who have had the happiness to enjoy it at first hand. It supplies the vein of comedy which runs through a momentous epoch, as the frolics of Falstaff and Prince Henry lighten the intrigues and wars of Shakespeare's chronicle plays.

"It is not likely to be forgotten, since what is great often attracts attention less than what is curious. Mr. Disraeli is a curious puzzle. Nobody ever mentions his name without a smile; nobody hears it without a corresponding smile. It awakens that sense of incongruity in the perception of which we are told that humor consists.

Among the staid respectabilities of English politics, Mr. Disraeli is Fifine at court, or turned duenna."

That there is such a thing as romance in politics, indeed, the career of him who is now Earl of Beaconsfield, a Knight of the Garter, and Prime-Minister of England, amply proves. That career has been a thrilling, romantic drama, with its "situations" and *dénoûments*, its *coups de théâtre*, its plots within plots, its sudden surprises, its brilliant effects, its startling changes of scene, its maze of mystery, and its final reward of "happiness ever after," from first to last. What a contrast to the lives of most statesmen has been his progress from the obscurity of a solicitor's chambers, and the discouraging isolation of a Jewish home, to the height of power and fame in the British Empire! In tracing it we find ourselves little worried by the dry details of figures and speeches; by mere lists of measures carried and offices attained; by monotonous accounts of parliamentary struggles, and alternate parliamentary victories and defeats. We are following the hero of an absorbing story, whose achievements are never dull, and who takes care never to let our interest flag. He prepares for us perpetual puzzles to solve. He springs unthought-of surprises upon us. He snatches unexpected triumphs from the very brink of humiliation, and, by a rapid succession of bold, brilliant, audacious strokes, unravels,

like the consummate political magician he is, the most tangled webs and most bewildering knots of statecraft.

He is peculiarly the picturesque figure of the politics of his age. The slow brain of the average Briton, who has been accustomed to hear of Disraeli, and read his speeches and observe his statecraft, for nearly forty years, has not yet done wondering at the rapidity of his rise, the tenacity of his hold on fame and power, and the secret of the vast authority he wields over the great majority of his countrymen.

Tenniel once represented Disraeli, in a striking sketch, as the Sphinx ; and it is, perhaps, partly the Egyptian-like mystery of his character and actions that has so attracted, bewildered, and fascinated the staid English people. His face is inscrutable ; to this day it is hard to define exactly what are his opinions ; what he will do next is always a query upon the lips of politicians, to which there is no echo of an answer.

In one respect, indeed, the romantic tinge which almost entirely colors Disraeli's character and career has been to his disadvantage. People are rather attracted to their picturesqueness than to the real results of his statesmanship. They are so intent upon waiting for *coups d'état* and brilliant surprises, that they fail to credit him with such substantial triumphs of statesmanship as he has achieved.

"From the day when he filled an uncongenial post in a solicitor's office; from the day when he wrote novels and satires, which did something more than amuse society, which added new treasures to the literature of his country; from the day when he was one of that gay throng of wits and fops of which he is now, alas! almost the last man left to us—Disraeli's life has been one that deserves and will unquestionably receive the study and the criticism of future generations.

"He was a man of mark before he entered Parliament; he had *made* himself a man of mark—he, the obscure son of a man of the middle class, foredoomed to the drudgery of conveyancing, was looked upon as a successful novelist and social critic, at a time when the great rival, who has pressed him so hard throughout his political career, was still a youth at Oxford."

One great lesson of this amazing career is the power of unterrified audacity and indomitable pluck. From first to last, Disraeli has never been known to shrink from a bold action, to hesitate from timidity, to be dismayed by ridicule, to flinch at the prospect of defeat, or to accept discomfiture. His pertinacity and patience have at all times kept pace with his ambition.

On one occasion, when he was a young man, on the point of entering Parliament, Disraeli was introduced to Lord Melbourne, then prime-minister. That genial and indolent statesman, hand-

some, rubicund, with an aristocratic, aquiline nose, and large blue eyes, that oftener twinkled with fun than flashed with fire, was struck with his appearance, and deigned to chat with him familiarly. Turning to him with a smile, Lord Melbourne said: "Well, Mr. Disraeli, what is your idea in entering Parliament? What is your ambition?"

"To be Prime-Minister of England, my lord!"

This, from a man still very young, and only known as a fashionable novelist and gay fop about town, was the very sublimity of audacity; but it was said in earnest. Here at least he made no secret of his towering ambition; and the lofty goal which, in entering political life, he had set before himself, he kept in sight, and struggled toward, with a grit and perseverance that never were surpassed by any hero of history, until at last he attained it.

To possess power, to wield influence—these seem the grand aim of his personal aspirations. Fond no doubt of pomp, glitter, title, the applause of senates and multitudes, the favor of sovereigns and the friendship of nobles and statesmen, the circumstances and ceremony of great occasions, the outward splendors of high office, he has yet always valued far more the sway of his mind over other minds, and the authority of his will over other wills.

"I am no cold-blooded philosopher," he ex-

claims in "Vivian Grey"—and in "Vivian Grey," we cannot doubt, he seeks to portray much of himself—"that would despise that for which, in my opinion, men—*real* men—should alone exist. Power! Oh, what sleepless nights! what days of hot anxiety! what exertions of mind and body! what travel! what hatred! what fierce encounters! what dangers of all possible kinds, would I not endure with a joyous spirit to gain it!"

To him, as he looked forth confidently, boldly, upon the difficult upward path which he was determined to pursue, and at the top of which his magnificent reward awaited him, it seemed that the way to govern mankind was "a smile for a friend, and a sneer for the world."

Looking in the mirror, and observing himself mentally and physically, the strangely ambitious youth, at but little over twenty-five, thus pictured what he expected to be as soon as his new book should win for himself a place in the esteem of the fashionable world (he is describing the Prime-Minister of Sweden in "Contarini Fleming"):

"The moment he entered society his thoughtful face would break into a fascinating smile, and he listened with interest to the tales of levity and joined with readiness in each frivolous pursuit. He was sumptuous in his habits, and was said to be even voluptuary. Perhaps he affected gallant-

ry because he was deeply impressed with the influence of women both upon public and private opinion. With them he was a universal favorite; and, as you beheld him assenting with conviction to their gay or serious nonsense, and waving with studied grace his perfumed handkerchief in his delicately white and jeweled hand, you might have supposed him for a moment a consummate lord-chamberlain—but only for a moment, for, had you caught his eye, you had withdrawn your gaze with precipitation and perhaps with awe. For the rest, he spoke all languages, never lost his self-possession, and never displayed a spark of strong feeling."

Already, while yet little more than a boy in age, he was a deep, observing student of the world around him, gauging the weaknesses of men and women, the foibles by which they might be led, the conduct which was to secure admiration and submission to the power of his genius. The motto which he placed on the title-page of "Vivian Grey" was that by which, through life, he has guided his acts and his ambition:

> "Why, then, the world's mine oyster,
> Which I with sword will open."

What has added immensely to the romance of this once obscure young man, meditating in the solitude of Bloomsbury the capture of society,

party, and power, has been the conspicuously Oriental quality of Disraeli's character, tendencies, and methods. He has been all the time a magician from the East, conjuring amid the broad-cloth civilization of the West. Proud to excess of the ancient race whence he sprang, he has derived from it a glowing imagination, a fondness for the majesty and glory of effect, a love of successes that are palpable, material, and brilliant.

To make the queen Empress of India was a masterpiece of Oriental inspiration and display.

It has been the result of a consummate art, that this dreamer of Jewish greatness in the past, and of Jewish glory in time to come, has been able to mould the public opinion of the most prosaic and practical people of Europe to his sovereign will. He has almost constantly, indeed, appeared in a dual character. No man could be more English in his obstinate adherence to tradition, in his assertion of "a spirited foreign policy," in his devotion to the Established Church, in his sympathies with land, custom, and privilege. Yet, with all this, he has retained the full measure of his Oriental inspirations and enthusiasms, and for the most part has appeared apart and solitary, like one who was essentially separated by instinct, feeling, and thought, from those by whom he was surrounded.

It is surely one of the marvels of this age

that he who declared, years ago, that "the slumber of the East is more vital than the waking life of the rest of the globe;" who, by the mouth of one of his heroes, said that it is only in Palestine that "the Creator of the world speaks with men;" who speaks of the "Venetian origin of the British Constitution;" who has for forty years taken every occasion to vaunt the superiority of the Jewish over the Saxon race, and who once told a nobleman of ancient descent that his (Disraeli's) ancestors were great when the noble lord's ancestors were hinds and robbers, should have so completely conquered the English mind and heart as to rule the empire for years with unquestioned and unchallenged power!

II.

In one respect, certainly, Disraeli is a "self-made man." The son of Jews, bearing upon his countenance and in his very name the indelible stamp of his Hebrew origin, and having rooted in his soul, and inevitably betraying by his mouth, Hebrew ideas and traits, without great fortune, forbidden by birth and blood the *entrée* into high society, it was far more difficult for him to conquer the deep and ancient prejudices of Englishmen, and to rise to be their virtual ruler, than for

the little-educated son of an American farmer, like Jackson, a rail-splitter, like Lincoln, or a tailor, like Andrew Johnson, to reach the presidency.

Lord Truro, the son of a tradesman, was Lord High Chancellor, and married a cousin of the queen. Lord Tenterden, the son of a barber, became Lord Chief-Justice of the King's Bench. William H. Smith, once a newsboy, is First Lord of the Admiralty, and will, no doubt, be a peer. But these only had to overcome poverty, and to struggle forward, Englishmen with Englishmen, to the height that their talents and virtues merited.

Disraeli was heavy-weighted from the first, with a burden from which no amount of wealth could relieve him, and which no exhibition of genius, however brilliant, could wholly put out of sight. He made a prime-minister out of a Jew, an earl out of a dandy, and a Knight of the Garter out of a young radical whose first essay in Parliament brought down upon him the crushing ridicule of nearly every man who heard him.

But George Eliot, in one of her stories, has said that a man of genius can only be accurately estimated by knowing something about his progenitors. While Disraeli has done much toward "making" himself, he in fact inherited pure and gentle blood; and derived, without doubt, from his Hebrew ancestors, the germs of the genius of which he has made such conspicuous use.

Right proudly he has told the world that there are Jews and Jews; that of all the Jewish castes, that of the Sephardim is the only caste extant which can boast of gentle blood in all its generations to the present time; and that among the few Sephardim still left on earth to maintain the dignity and honor of their descent, is comprised his own family.

The Disraelis have been, in succession, Spanish Jews, Italian Jews, and English Jews; and, like Jews, they have been a race of wanderers. Four centuries ago they were settled in Spain, thriving as they could in trade, but much harassed, like all their brethren, by the proceedings of the Holy Inquisition, which reserved its most persistent persecutions and choicest tortures for the people of Israel. At last one of them, having his peril of the rack and the branding-iron visibly brought home to him by the martyrdom of one of his friends, gathered up his goods, and, after many dangers and troubles, succeeded in escaping to the then hospitable shores of the powerful and flourishing Venetian Republic.

Hitherto, the family had borne another name; but the pious emigrant, who had thus fled from the terrors of the Inquisition, now commemorated that happy deliverance by assuming a new and significant cognomen. "Grateful to the God of Israel," says his famous descendant, "who had sustained them through unprecedented trials, and

guarded them through unheard-of perils, he assumed the name of Disraeli, a name never borne before or since by any other family, in order that their race might be forever recognized."

For two centuries the Disraelis lived and traded in peace under the then potent protection of the lion of St. Mark; not acquiring wealth, indeed, as many Jews of their time did, but toiling patiently on and living in comfort, and at least assured of life and liberty.

Finally Benjamin, the grandfather of Lord Beaconsfield, a more enterprising trader than his fathers, a shrewd young fellow, who heard wonderful stories of the ease with which fortunes were to be made in London, and how the Jews had begun to receive some installment of the much-vaunted British freedom; like all his race, moreover, not averse to adventure and wandering, emigrated from his soft native climate and repaired to the foggy capital of the north, where he settled down, and plodded thenceforth to the end of his mortal career.

Step by step he rose until he became, first a merchant of good repute for honesty and thrift, then a well-to-do citizen; and having attained this position, toward middle life he got married.

It is a pleasing picture that the grandson gives of his existence, after having made a fortune and a good name.

"He settled near Enfield," we are told, "where

he formed an Italian garden, entertained his friends, played whist with Sir Horace Mann, who was his great acquaintance, and who had known his brother at Venice as a banker, ate macaroni which was dressed by the Venetian consul, sang canzonettas ; and, notwithstanding a wife who never pardoned him his name, and a son who disappointed all his plans, and who to the last hour of his life was an enigma to him, lived till he was nearly ninety, and then died, in 1817, in the full enjoyment of prolonged existence."

The old man must, indeed, have been much tortured by the contempt with which his wife, herself a Jewess, regarded his name and race. She was seemingly a proud woman, who craved good society, and was "so mortified by her social position, that she lived until eighty without indulging a tender expression."

Disraeli, while he has inherited some of his grandfather's most salient traits—for the latter was "a man of ardent character, sanguine, courageous, speculative, fortunate, with a temper which no disappointment could disturb, and a brain, amid reverses, full of resource"—certainly did not derive from his grandmother her dislike of her Jewish blood, and her detestation of the ancient name.

She exhausted every art of persuasion in trying to induce Benjamin the elder to abandon his ancestral faith, and to embrace the tenets of the

English Church ; but in this she did not succeed. It is evident, indeed, that she was by no means the mistress of her husband's will ; for their only child was named Isaac, as if to still preserve in the family at least the Jewish memories of which he was so proud. This Isaac was "the very opposite of his father ; a timid recluse, living among his books, simple as Goldsmith, and learned as a grammarian of the middle ages. His birth left him without relations or family acquaintance."

According to his son, Isaac Disraeli "not only never entered into the politics of the day, but he could never understand them. He never was connected with any body or set of men, comrades of school or college, or confederates in that public life which, in England, is perhaps the only foundation of real friendship."

He began life by shocking his mercantile father with his enthusiasm for Rousseau, his abhorrence of trade, and his penchant for books, to which he took early, and to which he clung as long as life lasted.

"He was a complete literary character, a man who really passed his life in a library. Even marriage produced no change in these habits. He rose early to enter the chamber where he lived alone with his books, and at night his lamp was ever lit in the same walls. He disliked business, and he never required relaxation ; he was absorbed in his pursuits. In London his only amusement was

to ramble among booksellers ; if he entered a club it was only to go into the library. In the country he scarcely ever left his room but to saunter in abstraction upon a terrace, muse over a chapter, or coin a sentence. He had not a single passion or prejudice."

He became, and continued through life indeed, as dry and incorrigible an antiquarian, as diligent a plodder among old tomes and manuscripts, vellum-bound volumes and worm-eaten memoirs, as the veriest Dryasdust that Oxford or Cambridge contained in its cloisters.

But he was not dumb, gathering and not giving forth again. He published his chit-chat of literary learning, and from his pen came, perhaps, the quaintest books of the age in which he lived. He told the world all about authors and the personal lore of letters ; pictured the habits, foibles, eccentricities, the " curiosities," " amenities," and " quarrels," of the *genus irritabile.* In fact, he was the master of ceremonies of literature. His books are not only still extant, but read and quoted ; few libraries are without them ; and if you will look into a copy of them, a portrait of the genial old man, grown old, but still with a round, cheerful, shining, and unmistakably Jewish face, huge round spectacles upon his nose, having the air rather of a social good liver than of a plodder in the gossip of literature, will look out upon you from the frontispiece.

Isaac Disraeli, flourishing in ample competence, from the fair fortune left by his father, and the goodly royalties that flowed in from the sale of his books, lived to a green old age, gratified by the friendship of many of the literary lights whom he held in so healthy an awe and respect, and surviving long enough to rejoice in the rising promise of his son's genius.

In religious matters, Isaac, who was really a believer in Rousseau and Voltaire, was indifferent to his sect, and though he caused his little son Benjamin, at an early age, to "be received into the covenant of Abraham," he ended by causing his own name to be erased from the list of the contributing members of the synagogue.

When Benjamin had reached the age of twelve, the poet Rogers, it is said, induced Isaac to consent that the boy should be baptized in the Church of England ; and this actually took place at St. Andrew's, Holborn, July 31, 1817.

The early homes of Benjamin Disraeli are thus described :

"The house at Enfield seems to have been given up at an early date. Isaac Disraeli was one of the most constant frequenters of the British Museum ; and, for convenience of access, took a house, in or about 1809, in the King's Road, Gray's Inn, then an almost rural spot, and very different from the crowded locality it has since become. Later on, in 1825, he removed to an estate which he had

bought at Bradenham, in Bucks, and with that event commenced the connection of his illustrious son with the county which he has so aptly designated 'the county of statesmen.' From Bradenham House the prefaces to the early works and election addresses of the younger Disraeli were regularly dated, the removal to Hughenden Manor not occurring till after his marriage."

From his grandfather, then, Disraeli inherited his pluck, his ardor, his courage and hopefulness, his resource amid reverses, and his indomitable serenity of temper; from his father, that ardent love of books and letters which inspired his early triumphs, and which has lent grace and force to his oratorical career.

But to one of his sanguine and social temperament, his home must have been dull and tedious. "Reared in a home of as absolute seclusion from English society as if it had been placed in an island of the Mediterranean, with occasional glimpses, perhaps, at Enfield, of a strange society, more foreign than English, and more cosmopolitan than either, the young Disraeli must early have felt that strange sense of moral detachment from the nation in which he has lived, and in which he has attained the highest place, which is visible in his writings and his career. In both homes, he must soon have learned that his name and race placed a certain barrier between him and the distinctions

to which he aspired. They set him apart. He was outside the English world."

The obstacles before him, however, were only so many victories to be won ; and in the struggle and conflict he found a thrilling and happy excitement.

Isaac Disraeli was at least not too absorbed in his tomes to discern early his boy's precocious talent. He bestowed the greatest pains upon his education ; sent him for a while to school at Winchester and Walthamstowe ; infused into him his own keen love of literature and literary pursuits ; saw with exceeding joy Benjamin's sunny and elastic temperament ; hoped for a moment that he might make a great lawyer of him, and put him to drudgery in a solicitor's office—drudgery which the mercurial youth detested from the first, and got rid of as soon as he could ; then, despairing of his success in this direction, good-naturedly allowing Benjamin to follow his own erratic bent, and make his way, if he could, with a tyro's pen.

III.

One day, suddenly, "Vivian Grey" burst upon astonished society, and took it by storm. It found its way at once to every drawing-room table. It

was the town talk at ministerial *soirées*, in the lobbies of the House of Commons, at the Pall Mall clubs. Great ladies asked each other if they had read it; wondered who wrote it; guessed whom the author meant to represent as the Marquis of Carabas, and Lord Courtown, and Mr. Cleveland; and who was Vivian Grey himself.

It was a bulky book, in no less than five volumes; yet the first edition went off before the publishers could issue a second; those who could not afford to purchase it flocked to the circulating libraries to borrow it.

It was "a fashionable novel," and gave strangely vivid pictures of high life, not without many a sneer and sarcasm at high life's foibles, and boldly professing to portray some of the leaders of politics and fashion under the thin disguise of fictitious names. It was full of sounding maxims and hot tirades; and it sang loud pæans in praise of power and authority.

Aristocratic critics pounced upon it, and declared the picture "impudently false and outrageously absurd." People spoke of it as a strange jumble of radical politics, fashionable chit-chat, and original thought.

Then it leaked out that the author was not yet twenty, and that he was that black-eyed, curly-headed, flashily-dressed little Jew, the son of old Disraeli, the bookworm.

Disraeli had made his plunge for the pearl of

literary fame, and had grasped it. In the musty purlieu of the solicitor's office, instead of drawing deeds of settlement and droning over authorities on "mortmain," he had been feverishly plying his pen over his first novel; had issued it, and it had made "a hit."

It is said that, thus early, he had already conceived the singular and original idea of mounting in politics by a literary ladder. Addison had risen to the secretaryship of state by the "Spectator;" Mat Prior had won a place in diplomacy; Sheridan had graduated from "The School for Scandal" into the rank and fame of a great parliamentary orator; Canning, in his own time, had owed his earlier political progress to his pen. But it was a new notion to make way in politics by establishing a reputation as a fashionable novelist. The result proved that it was as successful as it was bold and unheard-of.

The hero of "Vivian Grey" is "a fast young man in upper-class life—a brilliant, fashionable, clever, sardonic, heartless, ambitious youth—possessed by an ardent craving for political intrigue, and a keen desire for fame and power, to achieve which he has no scruple about the means, employing tricks, falsities, and grand *coups de théâtre*, provided these will serve his purpose."

So immensely popular was it that not long after it was published a "Key to Vivian Grey" was issued, and ran through no less than ten edi-

tions within a year. Then was it divulged to the world whom the characters were really intended to portray, over which the fashionable folk had been torturing their brains for months.

"The studious father of the hero, who never interfered in politics, and who 'hopes the urchin will never scribble,' is, of course, sketched from Isaac Disraeli; while the son, educated at a private school, and full of wit and cleverness, is also undoubtedly designed, in the elements of his character, for the author himself."

In the crowd of figures who appear and disappear in the pages of the story, we are able—thanks to the "key"—to discern many of the most celebrated wits, politicians, and great ladies of the era of "Gentleman George." Lord Brougham struts and fumes as "Mr. Foaming Fudge;" the proud but dissolute Marquis of Clanricarde found himself odiously caricatured as Carabas, whose traits are really one of the chief satires of the book; that stout old Tory, Lord Eldon, poses as "Lord Past Century;" Mr. Canning is mercilessly ridiculed as "Mr. Charlatan Gas;" Mrs. Coutts is easily recognized under the pseudonym of "Mrs. Million;" Theodore Hook is pleasantly parodied as "Stanislaus Hoax;" Prince Esterhazy is seen as "Prince Hungary;" Lady Caroline Lamb receives the name of "Mrs. Felix Lorraine;" in "Prince Little Lilliput" it is not difficult to identify Prince Leopold, the uncle of the future queen,

and afterward the wise and sagacious King of the Belgians; the sumptuous Marquis of Hertford, whose revels in Regent's Park were then a scandal even to a scandal-loving court, appears thinly disguised as "Marquis of Grandgout;" and Prince Metternich, Austria's famous diplomat, masquerades as "Beckendorf."

"Vivian Grey," in short, was conceived and executed with the ambitious intent to capture a reputation; and so consummate was its art, so full was it of thought, and wit, of vivacious conversation, so replete with incident, so charged with daring sarcasm, original, sparkling, and coherent, that at one bound the young author rose to fame. The admixture of the politics of the day was a surprise; the audacious delineation of men and women actually living and in high places took away the breath of the *bon ton;* the strange and radical doctrines, insidiously smuggled into the very midst of the fashionable world, such as had once before invaded another fashionable world, in France, at the court of Louis XVI., just before the Revolution: all these were so many shrewd strokes to catch the public ear, and to set everybody to wondering and guessing, to denouncing or praising or laughing at "Vivian Grey."

IV.

To "Disraeli the younger," as, with filial loyalty and something, perhaps, of affectation, he began to style himself, "Vivian Grey" was an "open sesame" to high society. At first, people stared and half sneered at this demi-plebeian young Jew who could write such startling things; they did not more than half like him, though he had so glib a tongue, such fine conversational wit, and bore so graceful and easy a carriage in well-bred circles.

Yet, he became the "fashion." He began to appear, in gorgeous attire, and with all the self-composure of an experienced man of the world, in the much-frequented *salons* of those social leaders who prided themselves on cultivating and displaying the lions of the day. Everywhere he went, he was the subject of admiring glances, and the centre of interested groups. He saw with joyous pride that his intellectual brilliancy was confessed; nor, perhaps, was he chagrined to observe that the confession had been extorted instead of freely given.

To elbow dukes descended from the Conquest, gartered earls and powerful ministers, popular poets and famous men of wit and fashion, to be listened to with pleased attention by the belles and beauties of the West End, to evoke the

laughter of brilliant companies by the sparkle of his sallies and the sting of his satires, to find his table covered with coroneted invitations, to be sought for at all the social festivities and literary reunions of patrician London, was indeed a triumph to the recently obscure student of the law, and still almost beardless youth, in which he did not care to conceal his pride and delight.

It was a dazzling change, indeed, from the dull monotony of Bloomsbury to the unceasing gayety and movement of the West End; and "Disraeli the younger" drank freely and deeply of the draught of reputation and popularity he had won.

He bloomed forth, not only as a wit, but as a dandy of dandies, a gallant, and a man of the world. In dress, like a true Jew that he was, he was ostentatious and conspicuous almost to vulgarity. He joined clubs, frequented the stalls and *coulisses* of the opera, paid his devotions to the coquettish beauties of the day, rode in the park at fashionable hours, and, wherever it was "the thing" to show himself, there he was.

From one fashionable resort, in particular, he was almost never absent. No sooner had he appeared as a successful novelist than he attracted the attention and won the favor and friendship of the famous Countess of Blessington.

Lady Blessington occupied a somewhat pecu-

liar position in London society. Of low birth and Irish parentage, and with a not wholly unsullied reputation, this fascinating and brilliant woman had married, in his old age, the Earl of Blessington, who at once gave her, by reason of his rank and wealth, a conspicuous social position. Of this she availed herself to the utmost. She was ambitious, lively, witty, strikingly handsome, engaging, thoroughly good-natured, and lavishly hospitable; and her aspirations were speedily rewarded by her achieving an unquestioned place as a leader of fashion.

She did not, indeed, move in the highest circles of the nobility and the court; yet great nobles and courtiers frequented her mansion, Gore House. She loved, especially, to surround herself with young and rising literary genius; and her *salons* were almost nightly crowded by young poets, novelists, and politicians.

After Lord Blessington's death, her son-in-law, Count d'Orsay, "the most splendid specimen of a man," says N. P. Willis, "and well dressed one, that I have ever seen," resided with her, and most effectively aided her in dispensing the brilliant hospitalities of Gore House.

Lady Blessington is graphically described by Willis as being forty when he saw her, but looking "something on the sunny side of thirty. Her person is full, but preserves all the fineness of an admirable shape; her foot is not crowded in a

fashionable slipper, and her complexion is even of a girlish delicacy and freshness. Her dress of blue satin was cut low and folded across her bosom, in a way to show to advantage the round and sculpture-like curve and whiteness of a pair of exquisite shoulders; while her hair, dressed close to her head, and parted simply on her forehead with a rich *ferronnière* of turquoise, enveloped in clear outline a head with which it would be difficult to find a fault. Her features are regular, and her mouth, the most expressive of them, has a full ripeness and freedom of play, peculiar to the Irish physiognomy, and expressive of the most unsuspicious good humor. Add to all this a voice merry and sad by turns, but always musical, and manners of the most unpretending elegance, yet even more remarkable for their winning kindness, and you have the most prominent traits of one of the most lovely and fascinating women I have ever seen."

Such was the friend that Disraeli won at the outset of his society career, and who adhered to him warmly as long as she lived, praising him and petting him without stint, and eagerly defending him from the sneers of his rivals and the sarcasms of his enemies.

One who is still living, and who had the privilege of frequenting Lady Blessington's drawing-rooms when Disraeli was one of its young lions, thus charmingly describes that celebrated resort

of London celebrities and wits, and Disraeli himself as he appeared there :

"It is the height of the London season some forty years since, and we are standing in a long library in Lady Blessington's mansion in Seamore Place, whose sides are alternately covered with rows of magnificently-bound books and gorgeously-framed mirrors. The window, which is deep and runs the entire breadth of the room, opens upon Hyde Park. We have before us a letter, written by a gentleman at the time, describing his introduction to Lady Blessington in this very room, and from that letter we will venture to quote :

"'The picture to my eye as the door opened was a very lovely one : a woman of remarkable beauty, half buried in a *fauteuil* of yellow satin, reading by a magnificent lamp suspended from the centre of the arched ceiling ; sofas, couches, ottomans, and busts, arranged in rather a crowded sumptuousness through the room ; grand tables covered with expensive and elegant trifles in every corner; and a delicate white hand, relieved on the back of a book, to which the eye was attracted by the blaze of its diamond rings. As the servant mentioned my name, she rose and gave me her hand very cordially, and, a gentleman entering immediately afterward, she presented me to Count d'Orsay, the well-known Pelham of London.'

"There was no other room in Europe which

could boast of witnessing more brilliant reunions than those which were then in the habit of frequently assembling in that library in Seamore Place. The *salon* glitters with stars, and is resplendent with orders of every kind. Not a nation of the civilized world is without its representative. There are foreign counts, who have achieved eminence, and who speak every European language ; *attachés*, embassadors, and princes.

"There stands the greatest capitalist in the world, the original, possibly, of Sidonia of 'Coningsby' fame ; and there, in groups at intervals round the apartment, are met together all that is most eminent in every possible department and kind of excellence and skill in England.

"Mr. Lytton Bulwer, who has just won his spurs by his novel 'Pelham,' enters with an attractive frankness, and is received with *empressement* by the noble hostess. That speaker yonder with the merry eye and the Bacchus head is Tom Moore, criticising the *personnel* of the English House of Commons, and discussing the condition of Ireland. 'The great period of Ireland's glory,' you may hear him say, 'was between '82 and '98, and it was a time when a man almost lived with a pistol in his hand.'

"A volley of well-bred laughter draws your attention to another portion of the room ; you look up and you see Theodore Hook, the Lucian Gay of 'Coningsby,' with his hand on Lord Canter-

bury's sleeve, narrating the incidents of the last practical joke, or expatiating upon the theme of some new political squib for the *Examiner*.

"A little bit to the left you have Horace Smith, one of the authors of 'Rejected Addresses,' playing rather an *aside* in the conversation, interpolating a pun or a witticism whenever he gets a chance, but more a listener than a talker. There is a famous traveler just returned from Constantinople; and there, Henry Bulwer (the late Lord Dalling) discussing with great earnestness the last speech of Daniel O'Connell.

"Scattered about the room are such men as Lord Lyndhurst, Sir Robert Peel, Lord Strangford, Sir Thomas Lawrence, Henry Luttrell—the 'wit among lords, and the lord among wits'—the Hon. W. R. Spencer, and Captain Marryat.

"Two persons of different ages and different appearance, indeed, yet not without a strong mutual resemblance of feature, enter, and remind us, by the announcement of their names, that we have already delayed too long over the preliminaries of the subject of this article.

"The pair are Mr. Disraeli the elder and Mr. Disraeli the younger; and Lady Blessington receives them both with conspicuous welcome.

"It was only the other day that her ladyship was mentioning to a visitor how delightful it was to witness the old man's pride in his clever young son, and the son's respect and affection for his

father. Mr. Disraeli *père* is just now engaged in collecting materials for an exceedingly elaborate and comprehensive 'History of English Literature,' one of those books, unfortunately, which are destined never to advance beyond the stage of design.

"Mr. Disraeli *fils*, Disraeli 'the younger,' as you may read on the title-page of his new and soon to be issued volume, has lately made a triumphantly successful *début* in the arena of authorship. 'Vivian Grey' is the talk of the town. Who is the Marquis of Carabas? Can it be possible that Lord Courtown is really Sir ——? And then, who are all the German duchy celebrities? And if it comes to that, who is Vivian Grey himself? These are questions which sapient London is asking itself, and every day rejecting answers by the score, or framing new ones which are certain to meet a similar destiny of repudiation to-morrow.

"Just at this moment we will not puzzle ourselves with the interrogations as to who Mr. Vivian Grey is or is not; we may as well occupy ourselves with taking some personal observations as to the creator of Mr. Vivian Grey. And there he stands—'Disraeli the younger.' He has taken up his position in front of the hostess's mantelpiece, and you may note the clever young man at your leisure.

"Every one is looking at him to-night; for

Mr. Benjamin Disraeli has made a sensation, and sensation is what society loves, and of whose author it invariably makes a hero. It is possible that if we were to project ourselves somewhat forward in the course of time, and to glance at the costume of Mr. Benjamin Disraeli by the light of some ridiculously-advanced date in the world's history, say A. D. 1878, if our island is not by that time sunk deep in the sea's profound, we should pronounce it a trifle peculiar, antiquated perhaps.

"The coat is the coat of any ordinary civilian of the times, but not the waistcoat—a marvelous vest, in truth, gleaming in the wax-lights with its splendid embroidery of gorgeous gold flowers. Add to these, patent-leather pumps, a white stick with a black cord and tassel, and a mysterious complication of gold chains in the region of his neck and pockets—and you have a faithful picture of Disraeli the younger, author of 'Vivian Grey' and 'Contarini Fleming, a Psychological Autobiography.'"

V.

Lady Blessington, sitting in her luxurious drawing-room in 1835, and chatting in her cordial, enthusiastic, whole-souled way with her new

American acquaintance, N. P. Willis, is talking of literary people, and asks him :

"Do you know the Disraelis in America?"

"We do, indeed; 'Curiosities of Literature,' by the father, and 'Vivian Grey,' by the son, are universally known."

"I am pleased at that, too, for I like them both. Disraeli the elder, with his son, came here the other night. It would have delighted you to see the old man's pride in him. He is very fond of him, and as he was going away, he patted him on the head, and said to me, 'Take care of him, Lady Blessington, for my sake. He is a clever lad, but he wants ballast. I am glad he has the honor to know you, for you will check him sometimes when I am away.' Disraeli the elder lives in the country, about twenty miles from town, and seldom comes up to London. He is a very plain old man in his manners, as plain as his son is the reverse. Disraeli the younger is quite his own character of Vivian Grey, crowded with talent, but very *soigneux* of his curls, and a bit of a coxcomb. There is no reserve about him, however, and he is the only *joyous* dandy I ever saw."

The American looker-on in London was soon, thanks to Lady Blessington's hospitality, to have an opportunity to judge of the brilliant young author and fop for himself.

"I dined," he says, "at Lady Blessington's, in company with several authors, three or four noble-

men, and an exquisite or two. The authors were Bulwer, the novelist, and his brother, the statist; Proctor (better known as 'Barry Cornwall'); Disraeli, the author of 'Vivian Grey;' and Fonblanque, of the *Examiner*. The principal nobleman was the Earl of Durham, and the principal exquisite (though the word scarcely applies to the magnificent scale on which Nature made him, and on which he made himself) was Count d'Orsay. There were plates for twelve.

"Disraeli had arrived before me, and sat in the deep window, looking out upon Hyde Park, with the last rays of daylight reflected from the gorgeous gold flowers of a splendidly embroidered waistcoat.

"Disraeli has one of the most remarkable faces I ever saw. He is lividly pale, and but for the energy of his action and the strength of his lungs, would seem a victim to consumption. His eye is as black as Erebus, and has the most mocking, lying-in-wait sort of expression conceivable. His mouth is alive with a kind of working and impatient nervousness, and when he bursts forth, as he does constantly, with a partially successful cataract of expression, it assumes a curl of triumphant scorn that would be worthy of a Mephistopheles. His hair is as extraordinary as his taste in waistcoats. A thick, heavy mass of jet-black ringlets falls over his left cheek almost to his collarless stock, while on the right temple it is parted

and put away with the smooth carelessness of a girl's, and shines most unctuously

'With thy incomparable oil, Macassar!' "

The conversation on this occasion turned on new books, and a volume on Italy by Beckford, the friend of Byron, who "has luxuriated in every country with the fancy of a poet and the refined splendor of a Sybarite," was vivaciously discussed.

"Disraeli was the only one at the table who knew him, and the style in which he gave a sketch of his habits and manners was worthy of himself. I might as well attempt to gather up the foam of the sea as to convey an idea of the extraordinary language in which he clothed his description. There were, at least, five words in every sentence that must have been very much astonished at the use they were put to, and yet no others, apparently, could so well have conveyed his idea. Disraeli talked like a race-horse approaching the winning-post, every muscle in action, and the utmost energy of expression flung out in every burst. It is a great pity he is not in Parliament. It appeared, from Disraeli's account, that Beckford is a splendid egotist, determined to free life as much as possible from its usual fetters, and to enjoy it to the highest degree of which his genius, backed by an immense fortune, is capable."

From Beckford the chit-chat passed to Vic-

tor Hugo, then looming up brilliantly as novelist, dramatist, and poet. This awoke Disraeli's enthusiasm, and, "fired with his own eloquence, he started off, *à propos de bottes*, with a long story of impalement he had seen in Upper Egypt. It was as good, and perhaps as authentic, as the description of the chow-chow-tow in 'Vivian Grey.' He had arrived from Cairo on the third day after the man was transfixed by two stakes from hip to shoulder, and he was still alive! Then followed the sufferer's history, with a score of murders and barbarities, heaped together like Martin's 'Feast of Belshazzar,' with a mixture of horror and splendor, that was unparalleled in my experience of improvisation. No mystic priest of the Corybantes could have worked himself up into a finer frenzy of language."

When the ladies retired from the dining-room, and the gentlemen were left to themselves with their champagne and port, the talk turned, as it is quite apt to do, on the politics of the day. Daniel O'Connell was then a very conspicuous figure in the House.

"Disraeli's lips were playing on the edge of a champagne glass, which he had just drained, and off he shot again, with a description of an interview he had had with the agitator the day before, ending in a story of an Irish dragoon who was killed in the Peninsula. His name was Sarsfield. Disraeli told how his arm was shot off, and he was

bleeding to death. When told that he could not live, he called for a large silver goblet, out of which he usually drank his claret. He held it to the gushing artery and filled it to the brim with blood, looked at it a moment, turned it out slowly upon the ground, muttered to himself, 'If that had been shed for old Ireland!' and expired. You can have no idea how thrillingly this little story was told. Fonblanque, however, who is a cold political satirist, could see nothing in a man's 'decanting his claret' that was in the least sublime, and so Vivian Grey got into a passion, and for a while was silent.

"Slidell, the American, was spoken of, when Disraeli cried out, 'Slidell! I owe him two-pence, by Jove!' And he went on to relate how, sitting next to Mr. Slidell at a bull-fight at Seville, he wanted to buy a fan to keep off the flies, and having nothing but doubloons in his pocket, Mr. Slidell lent him a small Spanish coin to that value, which he owed him to this day.

"*A propos* to this, Disraeli gave a description, in a gorgeous, burlesque, galloping style, of a Spanish bull-fight; and when we were nearly dead with laughing, some one made a move, and we went up to Lady Blessington in the drawing-room. Lord Durham requested her ladyship to introduce him particularly to Disraeli—the effect of his eloquence."

On another occasion, at Lady Blessington's,

Disraeli made "a splendid defense" of Tom Moore's indifference to criticism; and in the course of a brilliant conversation "flared up," as a dandy would say, "immediately," on the subject of Platonism.

"His wild, black eyes glistened, and his nervous lips quivered and poured out eloquence; and a German professor, who had entered late, and the Russian *chargé d'affaires*, who had entered later, and a whole ottomanful of noble exquisites, listened with wonder. Disraeli gave us an account of Taylor, almost the last of the celebrated Platonists, who worshiped Jupiter in a back parlor in London a few years ago, with undoubted sincerity. He had an altar, Disraeli said, and a brazen figure of the Thunderer, and performed his devotions as regularly as the most pious *sacerdos* of the ancients. In his old age he was turned out of the lodgings he had occupied for a great number of years, and went to a friend in much distress to complain of the injustice. He had 'only attempted to worship his gods according to the dictates of his conscience.' 'Did you pay your bills?' asked his friend. 'Certainly.' 'Then what is the reason?' 'His landlady had taken offense at his sacrificing a bull to Jupiter in his back parlor.'

"The story sounded very Vivian-Grey-ish, and everybody laughed at it as a very good invention; but Disraeli quoted his father as his authority,

and it may appear in the 'Curiosities of Literature,' where, however, it will never be so well told as by the extraordinary creature from whom we had heard it."

Crabb Robinson used to see Disraeli at Lady Blessington's in those flourishing days of his society heroism. His first meeting with him is thus described in his autobiography :

"At Lady Blessington's, after tea. With her were D'Orsay, Dr. Lardner, Trelawney, Edward Bulwer. A stranger, whose conversation interested and pleased me, I found to be young Disraeli. He talked with spirit of German literature. He spoke of Landor's 'Satire' as having no satire in it. The chat was an amusing one."

From these pleasant glimpses of Disraeli as he appeared among fashionable people and at literary dinners, we perceive his brilliant talent for conversation ; his wit, and admirably dramatic way of telling a story ; his quick criticism of the books of the day ; his knowledge of, and insight into, the conspicuous figures before the public ; his enthusiasm, joyousness, and vivacity. By such qualities, he established himself in the circles to which he had aspired, and to which "Vivian Grey" had given him an entrance.

VI.

This pet of polite society, dazzling in dress and speech, full of talk and wit and self-confidence, seemingly plunged in all the dissipations and distractions of the hour, had, however, another side to his habits and character.

He was a fashionable fop of the drawing-room; he was also an intense and enthusiastic worker in his study at home. The success of "Vivian Grey" had fired all his ambition; he was eager to win new laurels, to pass on to new literary victories. His faith in his own powers was limitless; he had leaped at a bound to the side of Bulwer and Scott as a claimant for popular favor; he would rival Swift as a satirist. All the while, he kept his political aspirations in full view. He had his eye already on St. Stephen's, and imagined himself thrilling "the House" with his bold antitheses and glowing periods.

It was whispered in the clubs, "Young Disraeli actually wants to get into Parliament;" and the young politicians laughed scornfully, while the old stared and rolled up their eyes in amazement at such unparalleled audacity.

As suddenly as "Vivian Grey" had burst upon the town, "The Voyage of Captain Popanilla" made its appearance, and set the gossiping tongues of the West End once more wagging. It was in-

tended to be a modern "Gulliver," and to thinly disguise a bold and brilliant, yet good-natured, satire on the political and social follies of the day.

The scene of this satire was laid in "the isle of Fantasie," which meant Ireland, and that of "Vraibleusia" ("True-Blue" island), which stood for England, the capital of the latter being "Hubbabub," or London.

While thus reveling in his social popularity and literary conceits, Disraeli felt one longing which he could not repress. From earliest youth he had listened with eagerness to his father's praises of their ancient Jewish race. He had heard with pride its many noble traditions; had been thrilled with its career of glory and power; had read with the most absorbing interest the history of its greatness, its empire, and its misfortunes.

To be a Jew seemed to him to be the truest and purest aristocrat extant. The contempt and scorn which the English felt for the Jews only made him the prouder of his blood.

And now that, in his own person, he had conquered the aversion of good society, at least so far as himself was concerned; now that he had found a vocation and succeeded in it; now that, what with the royalties pouring in from "Vivian Grey" and "Popanilla," and the indulgence of a kind old father, who, tickled out of his equanimity by the youth's success, opened his

purse freely to him, he found himself in ample funds, he resolved at last to feed his eyes and his imagination upon those wondrous lands of the Orient which were the scenes of the Jewish struggles, deeds, and grandeur.

He started forth on a long journey, in company with his sister, and a Mr. Meredith, to whom his sister was betrothed. He went to Constantinople, and in the city of the emperors and the sultans spent a long, dreamy, delightful winter. Little, perhaps, did he then imagine that, years after, he would be the arbiter of the destinies of that fair, strange city, "at once beautiful and hideous," that "human bazaar of all nations, costumes, customs, physiognomies," the metropolis of three continents, the citadel that guards the watery portal where Europe meets Asia.

Thence he traveled with delight over many of the picturesque and romantic places of the East. He went to Albania, and there observed the singular and primitive customs of one of the most heroic people under Ottoman rule; then hastened eagerly to Syria, the land of his fathers, and the cradle of his race, where his glowing imagination found ample food, and where he stored his mind with facts and thoughts that imprinted their traces on all his subsequent literary works; explored Egypt and the Upper Nile; went thence to Jerusalem, where "he nearly lost his life in an attempt to penetrate the Mosque of

Omar;" sailed along the lovely coast of the Adriatic; delved into the grand antiquities of Rome; dreamed and wandered among the gorgeous ruins of the Alhambra; and on the historic plain of Troy conceived his "Revolutionary Epic," in which he sought to celebrate the great revolutionists of modern times, from Robespierre to John Frost. After nearly two years of wandering, he returned home, full to overflowing with new ideas and enthusiastic fancies, with which to concoct for the world fresh literary surprises. His first publication after his return was "The Young Duke," written very hastily, and the poorest of his novels, though it has some powerful passages.

Full to the brim of the dreams inspired by his travels in the Orient, he soon finished a tale which he had begun "under the deep shadow of Eastern tradition and romance"—"The Wondrous Tale of Alroy."

This romance, as one of his biographers says, "the critics universally hailed as a damning proof of the young author's literary lunacy. The book was beautifully written; yet it was an exhibition of romance run mad, which no elegances of style could redeem. Wild, incongruous, and raving, it was laughed at unmercifully; and for a writer to be laughed at in England, when he means to be serious—every one knows what the fate of that writer is. But Disraeli had pluck in him, and he

recovered himself in time, but not before he had perpetrated several other literary absurdities of an extraordinary kind."

"Alroy" is thus somewhat differently judged and graphically described by an American writer in *Appletons' Journal* for May, 1870:

"It is an Oriental romance of the twelfth century, founded on the extraordinary adventures of David Alroy, a Hebrew prince of the house of David, who claimed to be Messiah, and excited an insurrection of the Jews against the Seljukian rulers of the decaying caliphate. Its historical foundation is probably very slight; but, as a dramatic picture of Eastern manners, character, and scenery, of Hebrew belief, Hebrew superstitions, and Hebrew aspirations, it has very high value.

"The passionate and picturesque elements of Oriental life, the strange vicissitudes, the rapid revolutions, the barbaric magnificence, the prodigious pomp, the incredible successes, the overwhelming disasters of Oriental history, are depicted in the most glowing and graceful style, with singular boldness and warmth, and yet with consummate tact and delicacy. Warriors and priests, merchants and robbers, kings and courtiers, fanatics and intriguers, fair princesses and inspired prophetesses, are brought upon the scene in the most vivid and animated manner.

"The scenery of the desert, of the mighty

mountain-range of Elburz, of the fair and fertile plains of the Tigris, the life of the harem, of the court of the caliph, of the camp of the bandit and of the soldier, are described with a versatile power not surpassed in literature, and sufficient of itself to entitle the author to very high rank as a poet. The supernatural element, so consonant with the traditions of the Hebrews and the genius of the East, is introduced freely, and always with artistic skill and striking effect.

"Among the many powerfully drawn characters of the romance, we have space only to allude to the subtle and accomplished Honain, one of the most original and refined creations in the whole range of English fiction.

"In the profundity of its conception, and the rare and delicate genius of its execution, 'Alroy' rises above the common herd of novels, and takes rank with the few great poems of the world. It has to be studied, to be justly appreciated in its full scope and purpose, and will, we are confident, when better known, attain eventually an enduring fame."

"The Wondrous Tale of Alroy" was not the only book he had begun while on his travels. He published, about the same time with this, "Contarini Fleming, a Psychological Autobiography," which, he says in his preface, "was written with great care, after deep meditation, in a beautiful and distant land, favorable to composition. The

author," he goes on, "proposed to himself, in writing this work, a subject that has ever been held one of the most difficult and refined, and which is virgin in the imaginative literature of every country, namely, the development and formation of the literary character."

"Contarini Fleming" was welcomed at once with salvos of applause and a din of critical denunciation. Disraeli's purpose was achieved—to sustain and spread his fame, and keep himself before the public, the talk of the drawing-rooms and the clubs. But in the book, says Smiles, "there was the same flashiness and force [as in 'Vivian Grey'], the same dashing satire and exaggerated character, the same self-portraiture, the same desire to astonish people, and take them, as it were, by storm. And yet, withal, the book was full of brilliant writing and captivating imagery; and, though the taste that dictated it was often false, the thoughts are generally striking, and the language chaste, elegant, and classical."

Of this novel the writer in *Appletons'* has well said: "'Contarini Fleming' is assuredly one of the most perfect of English novels. It is a great prose poem, in conception, in tone, in characters, in incidents, in style. Contarini himself, in all his moods and mental struggles, is admirably depicted. The conflict between his Venetian nature and his Swedish position, 'the combination that connected in one being Scandinavia and the South,

and made the image of a distant and most romantic city continually act upon a nervous temperament, surrounded by the snows and forests of the North,' is finely conceived, and very happily carried out. Its successful execution was doubtless in great part due to the fact that the author wrote, not entirely from imagination, but from the vivid consciousness of his own refined and subtile Oriental and Italian nature, immersed in the chill atmosphere of prosaic England.

"The style of the book is worthy of the theme. It is animated and graceful, rich and melodious, though it may be a little too ornate for critical taste. The conversations are vivacious and easy, and the descriptions of scenery and of countries and cities, in which it abounds, singularly fine and effective, though brief. Its descriptions of Venice, of Florence, of Pisa, of Spain, Constantinople, Asia Minor, and Egypt, have never been surpassed in equal compass."

"I published 'Contarini Fleming' anonymously," says Disraeli, "and in the midst of a revolution. Gradually it found sympathizing readers; Goethe and Beckford were impelled to communicate their unsolicited opinions of it to its anonymous author, and I have since seen a criticism of it by Heine, of which any writer might be justly proud."

Aspiring to the laurels of a poet, Disraeli now plied his pen zealously in the production of a

"Revolutionary Epic;" and, to challenge the verdict of the public, issued in 1834 the first part of it before completing the rest. It was for the poet, he said, to embody in his verse the spirit of his time. The heroic period had its "Iliad;" conquering Rome its political epic, the "Æneid;" the Italian Renaissance, "The Divine Comedy;" the Reformation, "Paradise Lost." The spirit of *his* time was revolutionary. He says in his preface: "Is the revolution of France a less important event than the siege of Troy? Is Napoleon a less interesting character than Achilles?" "For me," he declares, with characteristic audacity, "remains the revolutionary epic."

Never, indeed, did young author more frankly and publicly plume himself upon his all-powerful genius than "Disraeli the younger," when he serenely posed as the Homer, the Virgil, the Dante, the Milton, of his time and age! "Whatever may be the public's decision," he placidly says in his preface, "I shall bow to it without a murmur. For I am not one who finds consolation for the neglect of my contemporaries in the imaginary plaudits of a more sympathetic posterity. The public, then, will decide whether this work is to be continued and completed; and, if it pass in the negative, I shall without a pang hurl my lyre to limbo."

The verdict of the public was indifference. Very few saw the book, of which only fifty copies

were printed for the first edition. Disraeli smilingly bowed his submission, and quietly abandoned his Homeric aspiration.

Several years elapsed before he gave his next romance to the world. He had begun to take an active part in politics; he was much distracted by social engagements; and he had begun to so far cool in his youthful ardor as to perceive that it would need time and reflection, as well as enthusiasm, to acquire an enduring literary fame.

"Henrietta Temple," which followed those of which we have spoken at an interval of three years, is, as says the writer in *Appletons'*, "a love-story, pure and simple, and a very charming one. Its heroine, who gives name to the novel, is one of those exquisitely gracious and refined women whom Disraeli loves to depict, and who are nowhere found in greater perfection than in his pages. It contains also one of his most agreeable creations in the character of Count Mirabel, whose unflagging vivacity, good-nature, and gay good sense, are very amusing. The love-letters of the book are singularly successful specimens of a difficult kind of composition, and throughout the work the fervor of youthful passion is happily expressed without anything like mawkishness or sentimentality."

The same writer, in speaking of Disraeli's novels as a whole, gives the following estimate of his style, genius, and method:

"As a novelist, Mr. Disraeli, though his works have circulated widely both in England and in this country, has not, we think, received that consideration to which he is justly entitled. He is one of the first of English authors in imagination, in art, in wit, in high invention, in subtile and refined delineation of character, and in clearness and grace of style. He is never obscure, and very seldom tiresome. There is hardly a dull page in all the thousands he has written.

"He is ever bright, sparkling, vivacious, and intelligible. And yet his characters and scenes are almost always in the highest walks of society, and his themes often rise to the loftiest heights of thought and the freshest and most daring speculations of modern research. Without the slightest trace of pedantry, he exhibits everywhere the training and the knowledge of the scholar, combined, in rare conjunction, with the wisdom and polish of the experienced man of the world.

"The two leading purposes of his novels, apart from certain political aims in some of them, are the vindication of the Hebrew race and the delineation of the English aristocracy. He has described the land of his ancestors, and defended the character and celebrated the genius of the chosen people, in many earnest and eloquent passages, in several of his works. But the general range of his characters and scenes is in the highest walks of English life. No other writer has depicted, with so

much art or so much accuracy, the habits, the manners, the conversation, the modes of thought and of feeling, the occupations and pursuits, the follies and the vices, of the 'upper ten thousand' of England. He has been all his life associated with them, and has had unrivaled facilities for their observation and study. He has watched them curiously, and painted them minutely, without caricature, though perhaps not without a little too much rose-color on his canvas.

"He has described their spacious domains, their picturesque parks, their stately mansions, their sumptuous life, their accomplished men and lovely women, as no other writer has described them, with inimitable grace and vivacity, and with a fullness and freedom which leave little to be desired.

"To all coming ages his novels will have an ever-increasing value for their brilliant and faithful representation of the highest phase in the social and political life of the foremost nation of the nineteenth century—a delineation all the more valuable because the mode of life which they depict, and the social organization to which they refer, are inevitably transient, and likely to pass away, at no distant period, under the influence of democratic ideas.

"It is fortunate for literature and for posterity that so perfect a picture of aristocratic England has been drawn by so skillful an artist in

such charming and enduring colors. What would we not give for an equally vivid contemporaneous delineation of the ruling class of Assyria or Egypt, of Athens or Rome, of feudal France or mediæval Italy?"

VII.

The picture presented of Disraeli in the preceding pages would scarcely seem to be the likeness of a practical and successful politician; far less that of a great party leader, and a statesman apt in dealing with perplexing questions of internal economy or foreign policy. A "joyous dandy," the frequenter of routs and balls, the satirist of the dinner-table, the author of extravagant society novels, full of genius, but also full of eccentricity and strange theories, recklessly uttered; a Jew by descent, moreover, certain, at his first attempt to enter the political arena, to meet with the stern, set prejudices of the English against Jews—there would seem to be no man less fitted or less likely to become a political figure.

But Disraeli, even from youth, was an ardent politician. He loved the fierce light that beats upon public characters. He yearned for the power which a successful party chief in England wields. He longed to share the triumphs of the forensic arena; to hold a House of Commons

spell-bound by his burst of rhetoric, and to hear the buzz of admiration which should circle round the crowded benches when he should fire a shaft of satire, or utter a masterpiece of invective; to have the papers sing choruses of applause at his speeches; to compel the conciliatory smiles of ministers; to revel in that combat of intellect against intellect, of wit against wit, of repartee against repartee, for which the House of Commons provided the most favorable and conspicuous of all arenas.

From his first entrance into society, therefore, he had kept his ambition and purpose steadily in view. By hook or by crook he would enter Parliament. At all hazards, he would try his fortunes in politics. Thus early, as we have seen in his celebrated reply to Lord Melbourne, he dared to raise his eye to the very summit of political power, and to imagine himself shaping the destinies of the empire "upon which the sun never sets."

But what were his political opinions at this period? As far as can be made out from his novels, they were a strange jumble of political ideas, largely colored by his Oriental dreams, partly high Tory, and partly Radical, if not revolutionary.

At one time he is eager to believe that the press and public opinion are more powerful than Parliament.

"Opinion," he declares, "is now supreme, and speaks in print. The representation of the press is far more complete than the representation of Parliament. Parliamentary representation was the happy device of a ruder age, to which it was admirably adapted; an age of semi-civilization, when there was a leading class in the community; but it exhibits many symptoms of desuetude. If we are forced to revolutions, let us propose to our consideration a free monarchy, established on fundamental laws, itself the apex of a vast pile of municipal and local government, ruling an educated people, represented by a free and intellectual press."

In "Coningsby," the most political of his tales, he treats the nobility with scorn; and forever preserves the odious picture of the tuft-hunting toady and time-server, in his Taper and Tadpole. He vigorously assails the rotten boroughs, and yet seems to be seeking to make a kind of "Young England Toryism popular."

"His sentiments," says Smiles, "are Tory, his presentiments are Radical. He feels like a Paladin, he thinks like a Republican. In 'Coningsby,' while he avers that 'the Whigs are worn out,' and that 'Radicalism is polluting,' he also emphatically declares that 'Conservatism is a sham.' Indeed, Mr. Disraeli is a thorough skeptic as regards all that we denominate social progress. He scouts it as a delusion, and represents it as a hoax."

Thus, attaching himself to no party, flaunting his Judaic pride in sneering British faces, temerariously uttering startling theories and magnificently rash ideas, he entered the race-course of politics weighted with still another heavy burden.

He had, however, in his social career, formed some valuable friendships. He had become intimate with Bulwer, a brilliant young novelist like himself, and like himself a waverer between Toryism and Radicalism, but, unlike himself, a son of a great county family, with a sound patrician descent, a most thorough education, and ample wealth. He had attracted the attention of the "bilious Lord Durham," one of the foremost of the reform statesmen. He had won the favor of the great Radical Hume, and of O'Connell, then at the height of his power, as holding the balance between the two great parties in the House. He had the advantage, moreover, of the social sway of the seductive Lady Blessington and the magnificent Count d'Orsay, who had the ear of powerful politicians, and were more than ready to use their influence for their brilliant and ambitious favorite.

With a strong will and a high ambition, he devoted himself, after the publication of "Contarini Fleming," more ardently than ever to the study of the politics of the time. He read political history in his study; he talked politics everywhere in fashionable circles. Conscious that elo-

cution was an essential to success, and observing with complacent satisfaction that few politicians of the day were accomplished orators, he studied this art with zeal, and, as it afterward proved, with success.

At last an opportunity appeared to present itself, and a way to open before him to the House of Commons. Bulwer, who was devoted to him, and whom Disraeli, nearly forty years afterward, was delighted to honor by causing him to be created a peer of England, advised him to come forward as a candidate in the little borough of High Wycombe, the seat for which had become vacant.

Disraeli jumped at the chance. It was nothing to him that his opponent was Colonel Grey, a brother of Earl Grey, then Premier of England; he entered the jousts as cheerily against this eminent patrician as he had always braved the laughter and ridicule of the world. Colonel Grey was sustained by the Whigs, and had the whole influence of the cabinet at his back. Disraeli had only a certificate of character from Edward Bulwer, Joseph Hume, and Lady Blessington. He was a party unto himself, and had only his own brains and pluck as his capital.

The manner in which he proposed himself to the electors was Disraelian, and nothing else. He freely denounced both the great parties in the state. He sneered loftily at the Whigs; and as for the Tories, they were "in a state of ignorant

stupefaction." They were haunted, he boldly added, "with a nervous apprehension of that bugbear, the people ; that bewildering title under which a miserable minority contrive to coerce and plunder a nation."

As might be expected, the staid folk of High Wycombe were rather bewildered by Disraeli's rhetoric than persuaded by his plea ; Colonel Grey was elected.

In the same year, however, Parliament was dissolved, and Disraeli, nothing discouraged, again asked High Wycombe to elect him. More boldly than ever he shot his arrows right and left among the great, tilted against every prejudice of party and custom, satirized hoary ministers and borough-laden lords, and drew fantastic sketches of premiers and chancellors. In the curious address which he made to the borough, he pictures Lord Brougham, then Lord Chancellor, "dangling about the great seal in post-chaises, spouting in pot-houses, and vowing that he would write to the sovereign by the post !"

This time he was defeated by only eleven votes.

It is said that Earl Grey, the premier, when he heard the name of his brother's opponent, superciliously asked, "Who is he ?" Disraeli was stung by the sneer, and immediately published an indignant pamphlet under this title. "It was a furious and very eloquent onslaught on the Whigs."

Disraeli's next attempt to get into Parliament

was in 1833, when a vacancy occurred in the metropolitan borough of Marylebone. He boldly told the electors that he "sought the support of neither of the aristocratic parties." Once, while making a speech in the borough, he was interrupted by some one in the audience, who cried out, "Upon what ground do you stand here, sir?"

"On my head, sir!" was Disraeli's sarcastic retort.

Marylebone would have none of him, for all his eloquence; and he was forced to resort next to Taunton, where Mr. Labouchere (afterward Lord Taunton, and son-in-law of Thomas Baring) was a candidate for reëlection.

The struggle at Taunton was a very bitter one. Labouchere was the candidate of the Whigs, while the Tories gave Disraeli a lukewarm support. O'Connell, the great Thor of Irish agitation, had just reconciled himself with the Whigs, and, to Disraeli's disgust, now used his influence with the Irish voters of Taunton in Labouchere's interest. Disraeli had counted on O'Connell's warm support; and finding it withdrawn from him, he launched out into a hot tirade against the Liberator. He called him an "incendiary," "a traitor," and exhausted his ample fund of invective on his head.

O'Connell was quick with his reply. Flinging back on Disraeli the epithets of "liar," "a living

lie," he gave utterance to that bitter and scathing denunciation of his antagonist which has become memorable in the annals of political eloquence. "He possesses," said the angry statesman, "just the qualities of the impenitent thief, whose name, I verily believe, must have been Disraeli. For aught I know, the present Disraeli is descended from him; and with the impression that he is, I now forgive the heir-at-law of the blasphemous thief who died upon the cross."

Long before this, O'Connell had fought a duel, and killed his opponent, and had publicly declared that he would never again accept a challenge. Lord Alvanley had sent him one, and he had refused to fight; so his son, Morgan O'Connell, had taken up the quarrel.

Disraeli was stung to the quick by O'Connell's insult; and lost no time in sending a challenge, not to him, but to Morgan, demanding satisfaction "for the insults which your father has so long lavished with impunity upon his political opponents." Justice, however, took the matter up, and before the foes could meet, Disraeli was arrested and bound over to keep the peace.

But he did not fail, even after this obstacle, to avenge himself. In a letter to O'Connell, sent to the papers, he wrote as follows:

"Mr. O'Connell: Although you have placed yourself out of the pale of civilization, still I am

one who will not be insulted, even by a Yahoo, without chastising it. *We shall meet at Philippi*, when I will seize the opportunity of inflicting castigation for the insults you have lavished upon me. B. DISRAELI."

By "Philippi," he was understood to mean the floor of the House of Commons; and there, indeed, not many years after, he met his foe face to face, and held many a tournament of invective and vituperation with him.

Failing to be returned at Taunton, as at Wycombe and Marylebone, Disraeli was still absolutely undiscouraged, and bore himself proudly and confidently amid the din of political conflict. Once more he took up his pen, not to write sparkling pictures of high life, or drape in the allegory of fiction his ideas of men and principles.

"He began to recover himself," says Smiles, "through the means of the press, always his great power. He wrote a very clever, brilliant, and admirable essay, entitled 'A Vindication of the English Constitution;' and, shortly after, he published in the *Times* newspaper a series of very clever letters, afterward collected in a volume, entitled 'Letters of Runnymede.' They were racy, brilliant, satirical, and well informed, though occasionally rather insolent in their smartness. It is also supposed that, about the same time, and even down to a recent date, Disraeli contributed

frequently to the leading columns of the 'Thunderer.'"

The "Vindication" was in the shape of a "Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord," who was Lord Lyndhurst, a native, it need not be forgotten, of Boston, Massachusetts, and lord chancellor under Wellington, of whom Disraeli has spoken as having "political courage, versatile ability, and masculine eloquence," and, not less, "tenderness of disposition, sweetness of temper, and ripe scholarship."

Among the friends he had made during his brief and so far unsuccessful political career was Mr. Wyndham Lewis, a fine specimen of the old British landed stock, and the husband of the lady who, after Mr. Lewis's death, became Mrs. Disraeli. Mr. Lewis, when the general election of 1837, for Victoria's first Parliament, approached, invited Disraeli to stand with him as a candidate in the borough of Maidstone. Disraeli eagerly accepted the invitation, and entered into the contest, side by side with his friend, as ardently and blithely as if he had never met a rebuff in politics.

At the close of the poll, the young aspirant thrilled with delight to learn that he stood second in the number of suffrages cast, and to hear himself formally declared, at last, a member of Parliament. One great object of ambition was fulfilled. It remained to make the best use of the vast opportunities before him. His foot was on

the stepping-stone to fame and power. It rested now with him whether he should rise or fall forever out of the chances of politics.

Meanwhile it is worth noting that Queen Victoria and he who, of all living statesmen, is her favorite and enjoys her completest confidence, began their public career together.

VIII.

Disraeli was in hot haste to display his eloquence in "the greatest debating society in the world." Lady Blessington and his other friends encouraged him to look for a brilliant triumph. They were sure he would produce a great sensation, and that he would leap at a bound to a national reputation as an orator.

He had not been in the House a year before he prepared to make his maiden speech, by which, he frankly let it be known, he expected to make a profound impression. It became the talk of the clubs, and the members of the House looked forward to the *début* of one whom they were half amused and half shocked to find at their side with almost as much impatience as did he himself.

When the debate on the Spottiswoode combination came up, Disraeli made this the pretext of his first harangue.

"How the names of the parliamentary chiefs who took part in this discussion," says Mark Rochester, "recall to mind a legislative epoch long since faded out of the recollection of the generality! Every name upon the list of the debaters of that evening is famous, historical—the name more or less of a celebrity. More than half the number—the elders among this group of actors—have long since been swept away into their graves. The rest, then inspirited by the earlier and halcyon visions of a youth kindling with ambition, still survive—one alone among them soured and disappointed, the others with many, at least, of their more golden hopes realized—statesmen at this moment both renowned and powerful."

It was the night of December 7, 1837. Smith O'Brien, the rash and eloquent patriot of Erin, opened the debate, and was followed by "Mr. Bulwer, then in his thirty-second year, and in the first radiance of his varied reputation; meditating the sequel of 'Ernest Maltravers;' potent, though so young a politician, if only by reason of his pamphlet on 'The Crisis;' fresh from the completion of the first two volumes of his history of 'Athens and the Athenians;' already standing midway in his brilliant career as a novelist, having even then produced half the number of his far-famed works of imagination."

Bulwer's speech on this occasion was one of the most vigorous and spirited he had yet delivered.

"He is followed by Sir William Follett, the great advocate, destined to expire, a few years later on, in the very act of extending his hand to grasp the seals of the chancellorship. A once familiar figure rises directly afterward; 'Old Glory' yonder, in the blue coat, the buckskins, and the top-boots—pleasant-featured, bald-headed Sir Francis Burdett."

Then "the Celtic Thunderer of the House," Daniel O'Connell, the very man whom Disraeli had so arrogantly promised "to meet at Philippi," started to his feet, and the chamber echoed with his sonorous brogue and his thunderbolt sentences.

Disraeli, sitting in the second row of benches opposite the Speaker's chair, among the "independent members," bent forward to catch his formidable foe's every word, and to mark his every glance and gesture. The benches were crowded; the galleries were full of interested listeners; it was just at that period of the evening when, in an exciting debate that inspires the bitter combat of party chiefs, the House of Commons warms up, and is ready to listen eagerly, to cheer vociferously, and, if need be, to burst into roars of laughter.

No sooner had O'Connell taken his seat than the young and impatient member for Maidstone sprang up, and in a clear and loud voice cried out, "Mr. Speaker!"

The floor was accorded to him, and in an in-

stant the House was hushed to a death-like stillness. Every eye was turned toward him. In the ladies' gallery sat Lady Blessington and her friends, awaiting with palpitating hearts the moment of their favorite's fate.

Scarcely had he begun to speak, however, when his attitude and manner, his grandiloquent sentences, his profuse gestures, brought down upon him the scoffs and ridicule of the assembly.

"Disraeli's appearance and manner," says one who witnessed this maiden effort, "were very singular. His dress also was peculiar; it had much of a theatrical aspect. His black hair was long and flowing, and he had a most ample crop of it. His gesture was abundant; he often appeared as if trying with what celerity he could move his body from one side to the other, and throw his hands out and draw them in again. At other times he flourished one hand before his face, and then the other. His voice, too, is of a very unusual kind. It is powerful, and had every justice done to it in the way of exercise; but there is something peculiar in it which I am at a loss to characterize. His utterance was rapid, and he never seemed at a loss for words. Notwithstanding the result of his first attempt, however, I am convinced," adds this shrewd judge of parliamentary talent, "that he is a man who possesses many of the requisites of a good debater."

Disraeli had not spoken more than a minute

or two when "he met with every possible manifestation of opposition and ridicule from the ministerial [Whig] benches, and was, on the other hand, cheered in the loudest and most earnest manner by his Tory friends ; and it is particularly deserving of mention that even Sir Robert Peel, who very rarely cheers any honorable gentleman, not even the most able and accomplished speakers of his own party, greeted Disraeli's speech with a prodigality of applause which must have been severely trying to the worthy baronet's lungs.

"Sir Robert, as usual, sat on the first row of benches, a little to Disraeli's left ; and so exceedingly anxious was the baronet to encourage the *débutant* to proceed, that he repeatedly turned round his head, and looking the youthful orator in the face, cheered him in most stentorian tones. All, however, would not do."

As Disraeli went on, he was more and more frequently interrupted by the ironical cheering, the feet-scraping, and the strange noises by which the House of Commons so freely manifests its displeasure. But he manfully struggled on to the end. He had composed his speech, and rehearsed it, and no power could stop him from finishing it. At last, however, losing all temper, and stung to desperation by the howling cat-calls and "shouts of laughter," he looked the Whigs indignantly in the face, and wound up his harangue in

loud tones that trembled with his anger and chagrin :

"If honorable members think it is fair thus to interrupt me, I will submit. [Great laughter.] I would not act so to any one ; that is all I can say. [Laughter and cries of "Go on."] But I beg simply to ask— ["Oh !" and loud laughter.] Nothing is so easy as to laugh. [Roars of laughter.] I really wish to put before the House what is our position. When we remember all this—when we remember all that, in spite of the support of the honorable gentleman, the member for Dublin, and his well-disciplined phalanx of patriots, and in spite of all this, we remember the Amatory Eclogue [roars of laughter]—the old loves and new loves that took place between the noble lord, the Tityrus of the treasury bench, and the learned Daphne of Liskeard [loud laughter and cries of "Question !"], which appeared as a fresh instance of the *amoris redintegratio* [excessive laughter] —when we remember at the same time that, with emancipated Ireland and enslaved England, on the one hand a triumphant nation, on the other a groaning people ; and, notwithstanding the noble lord, secure on the pedestal of power, may wield in one hand the keys of a St. Peter and—" Here the honorable member was interrupted with such loud and incessant bursts of laughter that it was impossible to know whether he really closed his sentence or not. The honorable member con-

cluded in these words: "Now, Mr. Speaker, we see the philosophical prejudices of man. [Laughter and cheers.] I respect cheers, even when they come from the lips of political opponents. [Renewed laughter.] I think, sir— ["Hear, hear!" and repeated cries of "Question, question!"] I am not at all surprised, sir, at the reception which I have received. [Continued laughter.] I have begun several times many things [laughter], and I have succeeded at last. [Fresh cries of "Question!"] Ay, sir; and though I sit down now, the time will come when you will hear me!" The honorable member delivered the last sentence in a very loud tone, and resumed his seat amid cheers from the opposition and much laughter from the ministerial benches. Of this indignant prophecy the world has long since seen the brilliant fulfillment.

The failure of this first essay was absolute and complete. For the nonce Disraeli became a laughing-stock. In the House, he could see contemptuous smiles passing from face to face as he entered; and at the clubs he was the butt of the choicest wit of their frequenters.

His pluck, however, was far from being dampened by what seemed an overwhelming and irreparable misfortune. He meant his audacious prophecy to the House in real earnest; and, not long after, expressed in "Tancred" his feeling about his discomfiture.

"A failure," said he, "is nothing. It may be deserved, or it may be remedied. In the first instance, it brings self-knowledge; in the second, it develops a new combination, which may be triumphant."

Instead, therefore, of taking his terrible failure to heart, he had the philosophy to seek to extract from it a lesson for the future. It may even be that, had he not suffered it, he might never have become the strong, vigorous, and effective orator, upon whose lips the House of Commons learned to love to hang in after-years.

IX.

At the time that Disraeli entered Parliament, there was another, younger man, though an older member, who had already won an enviable fame for the rare force and persuasiveness of his eloquence. He, too, like Disraeli, seems to have been inspired by an ambition to struggle forward to the highest rewards of political life.

A graduate, with the most distinguished honors, of the patrician university of Oxford, the acknowledged pet and champion of that institution, he had already proved himself able to handle the most perplexing questions of statesmanship, by writing an essay on the relations of church and state.

This was William Ewart Gladstone. These two young men, starting nearly together in the race for political honors, not far from the same age, but in almost every other respect as dissimilar as it was possible for two young men possessing the same ambition to be, were destined to be rivals, and the foremost rivals of their generation, from that day to this.

The contrast between Gladstone and Disraeli was very marked, even then. True, neither was of aristocratic birth. Gladstone was the son of a respectable Liverpool merchant, Disraeli the son of a Jewish man of letters. But, while Disraeli had started in political life almost entirely without high influence, and had won his place in Parliament by indomitable pluck, Gladstone entered the House as the pet and hope of the aristocratic Oxford party.

Disraeli was not a university student; Gladstone had been the most brilliant scholar which Oxford had lately produced. The family traditions of Disraeli were Jewish; those of Gladstone strongly linked with the Church of England. Their political ideas at the commencement of their political careers were sharply opposed to each other; and, strange to say, they are so, by a singular series of events, to-day—both having changed sides, and each thinking now what the other thought at the beginning.

Gladstone entered Parliament under the pat-

ronage of the Duke of Newcastle, and carried with him there as well the High Tory and High Church principles as the enthusiastic hopes of the University of Oxford. He was regarded as the future chief of the Tory party, as its strongest man among the rising generation. He was looked upon as the champion of the Established Church, in all its ancient privileges, powers, and abuses; and he was welcomed to Parliament by all the great men of the old Tory coterie, which had warred upon the United States and Napoleon I., which had refused to abolish the test oath, refused to grant Catholic emancipation and reform, and which had prosecuted Queen Caroline at the instigation of the heartless and dissolute George IV.; by the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Lord Lyndhurst, Westmoreland, and Buckingham.

Disraeli, on the contrary, began his political life as a strange political hybrid between Toryism and Radicalism. He had no aristocratic ties, no university prestige—was the pet of no church, of no caste; he naturally allied himself with Radical men, because, a Jew and a plebeian, he had nothing to hope for from the ancient ruling class in England. He was loud for reform, bitter against the aristocracy and the Church; almost preached democracy, and doubtless would have quite done so, had he dared.

To-day, the position of each is strikingly dif-

ferent. Disraeli has become the leader and the soul of the aristocratical Tory and High Church party—even its prime-minister, dictating to dukes, turning out lord chancellors with a quietly curt epistle, and dining familiarly with her Majesty at Windsor. Gladstone, on the other hand, has become the captain of the advance-guard of Liberalism ; and is so earnest to push forward, so eager to demolish the ideas of which, when young, he was the hottest champion, that he cannot keep the mass of Liberals apace with him.

Gladstone's success as a parliamentary orator was instant and unequivocal ; as we have seen, Disraeli's *début* was a desperate failure.

But his motto was "perseverantia omnia vincit." He sought to retrieve himself by patience, pertinacity, and study. Perhaps he had conned the story of Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and had compared himself to that famous civic "self-made man," as he turned away from the London streets, to come back again and conquer. The example of Charles James Fox, too, may not have been without its lesson to him ; Fox, who had been so persistently coughed down, but who had ended by becoming the first parliamentary orator of his time.

The "transformation scene" by which Disraeli gained not only a hearing, but authority in the House of Commons, was as sudden and surprising as the pitiful farce of his discomfiture had

been. All his friends had expected to see him succeed on the first occasion of his appearance in debate; they looked forward with fear and foreboding to the second. Like a wise man, he held his peace for a year and a half; and when, one afternoon in 1839, he again demanded the Speaker's recognition, it was to make a strong, sensible, straightforward speech, on the Chartist petition, which created a complete revulsion of feeling in his favor.

"He had already," says Smiles, "thrown away his poetic and historical imagery, and took his stand on facts, feelings, and strong common-sense. He had carefully unlearned his faults, studied the character of his audience, cultivated the arts of speech, and filled his mind with the elements of parliamentary knowledge." He had learned to feel "that success in oratory was not to be obtained at a bound, but had to be patiently worked for."

Now that the time had indeed come when the House would hear him, he was no longer the mere adventurer he had up to this period seemed to the public eye. Men could not, indeed, so soon forget his Jewish origin, for it everywhere confronted them in his features, and now and then in his ideas.

But he was now recognized as a good speaker. He had become a valuable ally, a formidable antagonist; the old Tory caste, while it might sneer

at him in whispers and behind his back, began to treat him with complacent patronage, to defer somewhat to him, and even to pat him on the back and encourage him. He won the friendship and confidence of a great noble and politician—Lord Stanley, afterward Earl of Derby—side by side with whom he was destined to fight furious political battles for many years, and whom he was finally to succeed as the powerful and trusted chief of the Tory party. With this party he now cast in his political fortunes. He declared himself a vigorous supporter of Sir Robert Peel, when he became premier in 1841, and for several years sustained him with all the energy and enthusiasm of his ardent nature.

X.

A MOMENT came, however, when the follower dared to pit himself against his chief, and the audacious aspirant became the most inveterate foe of the once all-powerful Nestor of Torydom.

The annals of Parliament contain no more memorable or exciting episode than the fierce war of invective, irony, and denunciation which Disraeli waged against Sir Robert Peel. The nation looked breathlessly on at this furious combat; nor have the friends of the elder statesman yet

forgotten or forgiven the stinging tirades which Disraeli then poured out upon their idolized leader.

The occasion of this quarrel was Sir Robert Peel's conversion to the policy of the abolition of the corn laws; of its cause there has been some difference of opinion. Disraeli's opponents have freely declared that it was due to Sir Robert's neglect to invite Disraeli to become a member of his ministry, and that this disappointment goaded Disraeli into his attitude of inveterate hostility. Others declare that Disraeli, foreseeing the disruption of the Tories, shrewdly took time by the forelock, by placing himself at the head of those Tories who were about to break away from their old chief. Whatever the cause, it is certain that the alteration in Disraeli's tone was sharp and sudden.

"Placed," said he, speaking of Sir Robert in a speech in 1841, "in an age of rapid civilization and rapid transition, he has adapted the practical character of his measures to the condition of the times. When in power, he has never proposed a change which he did not carry, and when in opposition he never forgot that he was the head of the great Conservative party. He never employed his influence for factious purposes, and has never been stimulated in his exertions by a disordered desire of obtaining office; above all, he has never carried himself to the opposite benches by making propositions by which he was not ready to

abide. Whether in or out of office, the right honorable baronet has done his best to make the settlement of the new Constitution of England work for the benefit of the present time and of posterity."

The change of tone, in three years, from this lavish panegyric to the most bitter taunts and most stinging sarcasm, was extreme. In one of the longest speeches Disraeli ever made in the House of Commons, he spoke thus contemptuously of his old leader:

"Sir, the right hon. gentleman has been accused of foregone treachery, of long-meditated deception . . . of always having intended to abandon the opinions by professing which he rose to power. Sir, I entirely acquit the right hon. gentleman of any such intention. I do it for this reason—that when I examine the career of this minister, who has filled a great space in the parliamentary history of this country, I find that for between thirty and forty years, from the days of Mr. Horner to the days of the hon. member for Stockport [Mr. Cobden], that right hon. gentleman has traded on the ideas and intelligence of others. His life has been one great appropriation clause. He is a burglar of others' intellect. . . . There is no statesman who has committed political petty larceny on so great a scale."

"The daring onslaught thus made by Disraeli," says Mark Rochester, "upon the authori-

tative leader of the House, the chief of a strong, apparently impregnable government, then the most practised of living debaters, one whose perfect mastery of all the arts of discussion was such that his assailant has since written of him emphatically that 'he played upon the House of Commons like an old fiddle'—that defiant, single-handed, unflinching onslaught, thus adventured upon by Disraeli, must ever remain on record as one of the most surprising incidents in the annals of the British Parliament.

"The missiles hurled by the assailant, with an aim that seldom if ever missed, were each as slight, apparently, but as potent, as a pebble of the Terebinthine valley. A deadly irony, a barbed sarcasm, a withering ridicule; here the stab of a sneer, here the thrust of a taunt, here the blow of an imputation.

"In a single sentence, sometimes, Disraeli struck to the right and to the left, at the domineering leader of the House of Commons, Sir Robert Peel, and at the despotic leader of the Lords, the Duke of Wellington."

"Another place," he exclaimed bitterly, in the parliamentary phrase signifying the House of Peers, "another place may be drilled into a guard-room, and the House of Commons may be degraded into a vestry!"

The principal, almost the exclusive object upon which, with a view to its demolition, he

plied all the keen and polished weapons of his satirical armory, was the overshadowing reputation of the one dominant statesman on the treasury bench in the popular assembly ; one until then unassailed, and by many deemed unassailable. Several of the gibes then directed against Sir Robert are as famous, as ridiculous, as laughter-moving, as a caricature by Gillray or by Rowlandson. "The right honorable baronet," said Disraeli, "has caught the Whigs bathing, and has run away with their clothes."

The great minister's solemn array of arguments he coolly degraded into so many fallacies based upon "tea-kettle precedents." Peel himself was flagrantly dubbed "a great parliamentary middleman." It was impossible even for his devoted partisans and personal adherents to listen and preserve a grave countenance.

Once, Sir Robert was earnestly recommended, by the implacable wit, "to stick to quotation ; because," said his relentless foe, "he [the premier] never quoted any passage that had not previously received the meed of parliamentary approbation."

On another occasion, the House was begged "to dethrone a dynasty of deception, by putting an end to this intolerable yoke of official despotism and parliamentary imposture."

The speeches of Sir Robert Peel, as reported in Hansard, were summarily characterized as "dreary pages of interminable talk, full of pre-

dictions falsified, pledges broken, calculations that have gone wrong, and budgets that have blown up ; and all this not relieved by a single original thought, a single generous impulse, a single happy expression." The political tactics of his government were summed up, with a subtle and exquisite wit, as "a system so matter-of-fact, yet so fallacious—taking in everybody, though everybody knew he was deceived ; a system so mechanical, yet so Machiavellian, that he could hardly say what it was, except a sort of humdrum hocus-pocus, in which the order of the day was moved, to take in a nation !"

This famous tirade was concluded by appealing to the House to prove that "cunning is not caution, nor habitual perfidy high policy of state."

Once more, Disraeli described his victim—for surely victim a statesman must be called who suffered from shafts so piercing—as "a man who bamboozled one party and plundered the other, till, having obtained a position to which he was not entitled, he called out, 'Let us have no party ! let us have fixity of tenure !'"

Alluding, on another occasion, to a previous decision of the House that had been canceled, "I really think," said Disraeli, "to rescind one vote during the session is enough. I don't think in reason we ought to be called upon to endure this degradation more than once a year. The right honorable baronet [Peel] has joined in the

antislavery cry ; but it seems that his horror of slavery extends to every place except the benches behind him. There, the gang is still assembled, and there the thong of the whip still sounds. If the whip were less heard there, the right honorable baronet's conduct would be more consistent with his professions."

"No marvel that the great minister worried under this deadly ridicule, and at last succumbed. No wonder the House learned at length to recognize in the ex-member for Maidstone the most brilliant satirist and one of the most gifted and daring debaters within the walls of the legislature. For the acerbity of these attacks, in which every sentence had the point of an epigram, Disraeli has magnanimously compensated since the death of his great antagonist, by a generous tribute to his genius, expressed in the language of admiration.

"If there be one peculiarity more conspicuous than another in the temperament of Disraeli, it is that of his possessing a generous capacity for the magnanimous appreciation of his parliamentary antagonists. Witness this, not merely his panegyric on Sir Robert Peel, but his noble eulogium on Lord Palmerston in one of the chapters of 'Tancred,' and his graceful but earnest encomium on Mr. Hume in the earlier pages of a later composition."

This same generous trait appears in the fine

tribute which Disraeli, some years after, paid to one of his most inveterate opponents, Lord John Russell, when he withdrew the Aberdeen Reform Bill. On this occasion the Tory leader said :

"Although it has been my fate to be always seated opposite to the noble lord, I can say, most sincerely, that no one in this House has a more heart-felt respect for the noble lord than I have. I think his character and career are precious possessions of the House of Commons ; and I am sure that the members of this House will always cherish them. Wherever the noble lord sits, I am sure he will be accompanied by the respect of every member of this House ; and I think the manner in which, to-night, he has made what was evidently a painful communication, is in every way worthy of the noble lord's character."

No more graceful praise was ever uttered by a statesman of a formidable and obstinate political rival.

XI.

Disraeli had not been long in Parliament before an event happened which had a very important influence on his after-career. It has already been said that one of his warmest supporters in the election at Maidstone was Mr. Wyndham Lewis, also a candidate for the borough.

After their success at the polls, Disraeli became more than ever intimate in his colleague's family circle; it was there that he had met the lady who was afterward to become one of the most devoted, helpful, and ambitious wives who ever lived.

Mr. Lewis was already ill when he was chosen at Maidstone; and he did not long survive to serve the borough in Parliament. Two years after his death, Disraeli married his widow.

It is said that this lady's attention was first attracted to her future second husband by reading and admiring "Vivian Grey;" that she so much admired the talent displayed in the book, that she took pains to seek out its author, to invite him to the hospitalities of her house, and to ardently befriend him in any possible way. She was not only an elegant leader of society, but a woman of superior intelligence, practical wisdom, profound sense, and noble character.

Despite the fact that she was fourteen years older than Disraeli, being, at the time of their marriage, forty-eight years of age while he was only thirty-four, their acquaintance quickly ripened into a most congenial friendship, and this deepened, after she became a widow, into an abiding mutual affection which lasted during her life.

It has always been remarked of Disraeli, indeed, that one of his finest traits of character was his loving and chivalrous devotion to the partner of his life. His leisure hours were always spent

in her congenial companionship. She was his counselor in all his labors, political and intellectual; went over his speeches with him, discussed what course he should pursue at difficult junctures, shared the joy of his triumphs, and was his efficient consoler in his discomfitures. He seldom appeared in society unless in her company; and always seemed as proud of her and as tender of her as if, instead of being a matron much older than himself, she had been a fair and youthful bride.

Often was he seen, when his wife had, before him, grown aged and feeble, slowly walking in the London streets, supporting her on his arm, carefully accommodating his pace to hers, bending his head with tender deference when she spoke, and chatting to her in his pleasant, jaunty way. She, on the other hand, reveled in his brilliant feats, and it was the happiness of her life to applaud his successes, and spur him on to the highest flights at which his ambition could aim.

It was her custom to never be absent from a debate in the House of Commons in which he was to take part. Night after night, her tall, frail figure and quiet, intelligent face were seen in the ladies' gallery, which was shut in by glass windows, and where she nearly always occupied a front seat. When Disraeli rose to speak, she would lean forward, a new light would gleam from her eyes, and she would listen almost breathlessly to

every word he uttered, and watch every gesture and movement he made.

Disraeli has always prepared his speeches with the greatest care. Without writing them out in full, he made copious notes, and his rhetorical flights, epigrammatic "hits," and florid perorations were invariably prepared and polished with minute attention. When his mind was once charged with a contemplated speech, he became absorbed in it, and was very particular not to have it disturbed or diverted to other matters. He would hasten directly from his study to the House, sit there wrapped in thought, with his hat over his eyes, speaking to or noticing no one, until the time came for him to rise and deliver himself of his harangue.

His wife knew how important it was that he should be undisturbed; and, though she always accompanied him in his carriage from their home at the West End to Westminster, she would remain silent during the drive, that he might cogitate his speech in peace.

On one occasion, Disraeli entered the carriage first, and his wife followed him. As she was getting in, however, resting her hand on the door, the carriage window fell, and crushed and firmly held her thumb, so that she could not easily extricate it.

The position of her thumb, jammed and lacerated as it was, was excruciatingly painful. But

she neither tried to withdraw it, nor did she utter a sound. Heroically she held it there, tortured as she was, while the carriage rattled over the streets, and jolted and jarred, with each jolt adding a new thrill of pain.

On reaching the Parliament House, she quietly lifted the window, concealed the bruised thumb, and, as she parted from her husband at the door, gave him a serene, bright, encouraging smile. She passed on to the ladies' gallery, and he into the House. He made one more of his sparkling, dashing, fascinating speeches ; nor did he learn of the suffering thus endured by his faithful wife until, his triumph achieved, they returned home again. Disraeli never let a proper occasion pass without bearing public testimony to the noble virtues of his wife, and attributing to her advice and inspiration a large share of his political success.

Once, at one of those autumn "harvest-homes" which he has always delighted to frequent, the cares of politics being thrown aside, at Hughenden, he launched into an ardent eulogy of her, declaring her to be "the best wife in England." He told the students of one of the Scotch universities, of which he had been elected lord rector, that if he had risen to high seats in the councils of the nation, he had Mrs. Disraeli to thank for it. His novel "Sibyl," of which he was especially proud, he dedicated fondly "to the most severe of critics, but a perfect wife."

Happily she lived long enough to see the fulfillment of his and her loftiest aspirations. It was the proudest day of her life when her idolized husband became at last Prime-Minister of England; and aged as she was, she presided with singular grace, dignity, and refinement, over the household of the real ruler of the realm.

When he was about to retire from the premiership, and transfer it to his life-long rival, Gladstone, the queen, with whom Disraeli has always been a special favorite, offered him a peerage. While grateful for this intended honor, he declined it; but told the queen that, if she desired to bear such a testimony to his public services, she could not more greatly favor him than to confer the peerage on the loving partner of his life.

So, while he remained simply Mr. Disraeli, and continued for some years longer to sit in his accustomed place in the House of Commons, his wife became "Viscountess Beaconsfield," and took her rank among the nobility of the kingdom.

She died several years ago, and was tenderly laid in her last resting-place, the family tomb at Hughenden.

XII.

During the busy periods between Disraeli's entrance into Parliament and his promotion, after the fall of Sir Robert Peel, to the position of a leader of the out-and-out Tories, neither his fancy nor his pen was by any means idle.

At intervals of two or three years, other novels were the fruit of his relaxation from political toil and warfare; he could not resist those fascinations of imaginative literature, following the allurements of which he had won name and fame; and so far was he from being ashamed of his early literary work, or cowed by the sneers of his opponents, that he more audaciously than ever followed the bent of his mind, and boldly clothed daring political ideas in the attractive dress of fiction.

First came "Venetia," a novel given to the world the first year he entered the House of Commons.

Of this novel, the writer in *Appletons'* says that it is "the most purely literary of Disraeli's novels. It is an attempt to shadow forth two of the most renowned and refined spirits that have adorned these our latter times—Byron and Shelley—who are represented under the names of Lord Cadurcis and Marmion Herbert. To Herbert, however, are assigned many of the incidents of Byron's

history, and to Cadurcis the melancholy termination of Shelley's life by drowning in the Mediterranean. Herbert is represented as separated from his wife, and his daughter Venetia, who gives name to the novel, is, like Ada Byron, brought up in ignorance of her father and his unhappy career. The time of the novel, also, is thrown back to the period of the American Revolution, before either Byron or Shelley was born. In other respects, the story of the two great and unhappy poets is very closely followed."

Then, in quick succession, came the three most celebrated, perhaps, of all Disraeli's works of fiction, excepting his very last, "Lothair." These were what he was pleased to style a "trilogy" of political novels: "Coningsby," "Sibyl," and "Tancred."

Disraeli had long in contemplation the formation of a new party, which he called that of "Young England"—a cross between Radicalism and Toryism; and to the "Young England" party the first of the three, "Coningsby," was devoted. In it he explained thus his political idea:

"To change back the oligarchy into a generous aristocracy round a real throne; to infuse life and vigor into the Church as the trainer of the nation by the revival of a convocation, then dumb, on a wide basis, and not, as has been since done, in the shape of a priestly section; to establish a commercial code on the principles successfully

negotiated by Lord Bolingbroke at Utrecht, and which, though baffled at the time by a Whig Parliament, were subsequently and triumphantly vindicated by his political pupil and heir, Mr. Pitt; to govern Ireland according to the policy of Charles I., and not of Oliver Cromwell; to emancipate the political constituency of 1832 from its sectarian bondage and contracted sympathies; to elevate the physical as well as the moral condition of the people by establishing that labor requires regulation as much as property, and all this rather by the use of ancient forms and the restoration of the past than by political revolutions founded upon abstract ideas."

"Coningsby," and the manner in which it was received, are vividly described in these words: "In its way, 'Coningsby' was as great and as startling a success as 'Vivian Grey.' It has been very heartily abused; it has been praised almost as heartily. It has been condemned for relying for its attractiveness on the most ephemeral qualities, and it is still popular enough to yield a good income to its publishers. It is accused of personality; and in spite of the fact that the greater number of the persons satirized are dead, the caricatures survive.

"At this distance of time no harm can be done by recalling a few of those whose idiosyncrasies are thus hit off. The hero is of course Lord Lyttelton; Rigby is said to have been intended for

Mr. John Wilson Croker. Lord Monmouth, Coningsby's grandfather, is a faithful portrait—not in oil—of Lord Hertford; while the Duke and Lord Henry Sidney stand respectively for the Duke of Rutland and Lord John Manners. Lucian Gay is of course Theodore Hook, and Mr. Gladstone significantly figures as Oswald Milbank. Lord and Lady Everingham stand for the Earl and Countess of Clarendon; Lady St. Julians for Lady Jersey, and the Duke and Duchess of Agincourt for the Duke and Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos. Taper and Tadpole are said, on less authority, to stand for Mr. Ross and Mr. Pringle, whose names were once familiar to the political world, but who are now forgotten."

Of this novel, another critic says: "'Coningsby' is very brilliant and powerful. It has great wit and more humor than the author usually displays. The sketch of 'The Right Honorable Nicholas Rigby' is a masterpiece of satire, and the character of 'Sidonia' a fine conception admirably carried out."

The next novel of the trilogy was "Sibyl," which, as has been said, was dedicated to his wife, and was the author's especial pride. It was intended as a sort of sequel, or development, of "Coningsby," and "is a story of singular power, full of those touches of higher art of which, in some quarters, the author is believed to be incapable." It deals largely with the famous Chartist

troubles of the times during which it was written. It has "great variety, its scenes and characters ranging from the highest patrician circles to the lowest depth of social degradation. It contains a startling picture of the misery of the lower orders of England, very striking in itself, and very significant as proceeding from the authentic pen of one of her most eminent statesmen."

Following "Sibyl" came "Tancred," by far the most quoted and in some respects most powerful and impressive of Disraeli's romances. "It was a true instinct," says the author of "Political Portraits," "which directed Disraeli's youthful footsteps, as it almost always, after more or less wandering, has directed his pen, to his ancestral East." "Tancred" was the most finished, the most ripened, outcome of that Oriental journey.

Its great idea is the supremacy of the Jewish race; while as a glowing picture of Oriental life and character, and as a graphic contrast between the genius of the West and that of the East, it is superior to, though more subdued than, "Alroy."

"In 'Alroy,'" says the writer in *Appletons'* whom we have so often quoted, "the author is only a poet, though a very great one. In 'Tancred' he has become a statesman, without ceasing to be also a poet. The 'New Crusade' (the other title of the book) is that of a young English nobleman, who seeks to discover at the fountain-head

the source and meaning of the great Asian mystery, and sets out accordingly for the Holy Land, like his chivalrous ancestors of the twelfth century. He there falls in with the mysterious Ansarey, an obscure and singular Syrian tribe, adhering to ancient paganism, of whom a most interesting and original description is given.

"The English part of the novel, with which it begins, is very charming for its easy grace and pleasant satire of the prevalent follies of the day. Nothing can be better than the Darwinian young lady who has read 'The Revelations of Chaos,' which explains everything, and shows you exactly how a star is formed, and who believes that we were once fishes and shall yet be crows. Equally good is the fashionable lady who mingles sentiment with stock-jobbing, and is prostrated in the presence of her romantic lover by a telegram announcing a fall in the shares of a railroad."

Nearly thirty years were to elapse, after Disraeli had written "Finis" to "Tancred," before he again resumed his pen to indulge his genius for suggestive fiction. It was not until after he had reached and then retired from the great office which he was destined afterward to hold a second time, that, in the leisure of political opposition, he wrote and published "Lothair." The hand of the magician was still deft and cunning, the fire of his fancy still glowed with a warm and luminous flame; he proved that lengthening age had not

deprived him of the zest for literary work, or diminished the power of his art.

It has been said of "Lothair" that it is "less political than its immediate predecessors. English politics, in fact, scarcely enter into it at all except in a few Fenian sketches. Its hero, Lord Lothair, is, like Tancred, a young English nobleman of the highest rank and of enormous wealth, one of whose guardians during his orphan minority was a Jesuit, who is a cardinal of the Church of Rome, and who strives to bring his ward over to Romanism. For this purpose he employs all the arts and wiles of the Jesuits, which are narrated very minutely, and with the author's highest skill.

"Lothair, after a series of adventures, in which Colonel Campian, an American, and his Italian wife Theodora, are conspicuous, joins the Garibaldian army which sought in 1867 to drive the pope from Rome, is initiated into the great secret revolutionary societies of 'the Mary Anne,' and the 'Madre Natura,' and, desperately wounded in the battle of Mentone, falls into the hands of the papal forces, and is consigned to the care of his Jesuit friends in Rome. They renew their efforts to convert him, and by strange and varied arts very nearly succeed.

"He escapes, however, first to Sicily; then in an open boat to Malta, where, under English protection, he baffles the pursuit of the Jesuits, and

embarks for the East and visits Jerusalem. His experiences there are narrated in the author's best style, and are very peculiar and curious.

"Its perusal shows that, in the interval since he published 'Tancred,' Mr. Disraeli's invention has not lost its force, nor his hand its cunning. He is destined to a high and enduring reputation in literature, and long after English power has decayed and English ministries have passed into oblivion, his brilliant pictures of English life and character will survive, and 'far climes and distant ages will respond to the magic of his sympathetic page.'"

"Disraeli's writings," says a writer in *London Society*, "have always been pure and elevating in tone. The characters which he has selected for eulogy, or the models which he has held up for imitation, have all been of an ennobling kind. The atmosphere into which he introduces us is healthy and sweet. His husbands are honest; his wives are true; his maidens are pure; and his lads are ingenuous. He has never written a word which a father would not read to his daughter, or a lover to his betrothed. And, in 'Vivian Grey' and 'Lothair' alike, there is the same chivalry of sentiment, the same generosity of soul, the same loyalty to the cause of friendship. There is nothing more interesting in Mr. Disraeli's history than his devotion to and his championship of those whose friendship he has made. In his biography

of Lord George Bentinck, professedly a panegyric as that biography is, there is not a word which savors of fulsome insincerity."

XIII.

From the day that Sir Robert Peel, "abandoning his party to serve his country," repealed the corn laws, Lord Stanley (later Earl of Derby), who had been a reformer of 1832, and Disràeli, the author of radical "Coningsby," became the acknowledged leaders of the old-fashioned Tories, and thenceforward were to put themselves obstinately against the tide of progress which had permanently set in in England.

From that time, too, Disraeli acquired another of those many and singular honors which are the rewards of English statesmen; he made his appearance in *Punch;* and nearly every week, for thirty years, his Jewish curls, and large black eyes, and bold thick nose, and long narrow face, have appeared in that most unique of political satires. "Dizzy," a nickname originated by *Punch*, became his appellation everywhere among the facetious of society, and by that name he is known from Land's End to John O'Groat's House.

The time had not yet come, however, when he

could be the unquestioned chief of the Tory party. As long as the eloquent and chivalrous Earl of Derby lived, and took a part in politics, his place was the second one. Derby had birth, wealth, personal popularity, wide family connection, and great parliamentary talent; of these Disraeli had only the last. His birth was, as far as his relations with the Tories were concerned, far worse than useless; his property was limited; far from being personally popular, we doubt if there ever was an English statesman more positively and generally disliked; far from being politically trusted, we doubt if there was ever a party leader who inspired less confidence.

The nobles who followed him knew that he had been a Radical, and that he was intensely ambitious; might he not, then, still be a Radical at heart, and, some fine day, betray them all into the hands of their enemies? Some such idea was once actually expressed by a noble lord who loved Toryism, but not its Hebrew exponent; and when we remember that Disraeli, some years after, persuaded the Tories to pass a reform bill, compared with which that proposed by the Liberals was no reform at all, the utterance seems to have been shrewdly prophetic.

Strange to say, too, Disraeli's literary reputation was a serious obstacle to obtaining the confidence of his political associates. The Howards and Nevilles, the Percys and Wellesleys, the

Courtenays and Churchills, reluctantly followed the lead of a sensational novelist.

The repugnance of the patrician Tories to him was so great, that though they sat with him in council, and deferred to his opinions, they long neglected to extend to him the hospitality of their houses.

Yet with all these obstacles and prejudices—prejudices which must have bitterly, in secret, galled a high spirit like that of Disraeli—he succeeded in establishing himself more and more firmly as an absolute necessity to his party.

A hasty temper, an impudent remark, a petulant outburst of resentment, might have forever overthrown him. Had he committed such a blunder, there were plenty in his own ranks to seize upon it as an opportunity to get rid of him. He had few ties, little extraneous propping, to save him. For one reason alone was he endured by the Tories: he was useful, he had the power and the genius to save them. A more imperturbable equanimity of temper, a more perfect self-control, a serener patience, have never been displayed in a political career, than his during his leadership of the Tory party. If his soul has been stung by contempt or superciliousness, he has not only concealed the wound, but has availed himself of it in castigating his foes.

The greatest master of irony of his time, he has, armed with this formidable gift, lashed his

adversaries the more severely, by keeping a cool and steady head and a firm hand, that never forgot their power.

Willing to stand alone, submitting to be barely suffered, conscious that his party allies were seldom his personal friends, Disraeli has owed his success as much to his admirable pluck and his excellent temper as to his brilliant and aggressive talents.

It was mainly through his leadership that the Tories, thrown into confusion by Peel's defection, were reformed into a compact and disciplined body, and gradually increased in popularity and power.

XIV.

The time quickly came when the reward of his consummate generalship, in conjunction with that of Derby, was reaped. In 1852, Lord John Russell resigned the premiership, and the Earl of Derby, with a Tory cabinet, succeeded him.

Everybody awaited with curiosity to see what part Disraeli would now be called upon to play. He was without question the second man in the triumphant party; to him, in large measure, was due its triumph; he led it in the House of Commons. Yet, was it possible that this fantastic figure, as he was still considered, would actually

be made, as was customary, Chancellor of the Exchequer? People smiled to imagine "Vivian Grey" proposing a budget, and arranging the finances of England; to think of this whilom Radical lording it officially in the House over younger sons of peers and staid but proud old county baronets.

The Earl of Derby was brave enough to meet the storm of his own party, of his noble connections, and of the deep-seated prejudices of England. Disraeli could not be spared. He would take no office but the Chancellorship of the Exchequer; and Chancellor of the Exchequer, therefore, he became.

How the English public took this startling appointment may be somewhat judged by a witty letter, written at this time by Douglas Jerrold to his friend Mr. Novello:

"I must congratulate you on the advent of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Right Honorable Benjamin Disraeli is the successful man of letters. He has ink in his veins. The goosequill—let gold and silver sticks twinkle as they may—leads the House of Commons. Thus I feel confident that the literary instincts of the right honorable gentleman will give new animation to the coldness of statesmanship, apt to be numbed by tightness of red tape. We were, I know, early taught to despair of the right honor-

able gentleman, because he is allowed to be the smallest of things, 'a wit.' Is arithmetic forever to be the monopoly of substantial respectable dullness? Must it be that a Chancellor of the Exchequer, like Portia's portrait, is only to be found in lead? No; I have a cheerful faith that our new fiscal minister will, to the confusion of obese dullness, show his potency over pounds, shillings, and pence. The Exchequer L. S. D., that have hitherto been as the three witches—the weird sisters—stopping, whenever we turned, the right honorable gentleman will at least transform into the three Graces, making them in all their salutations, at home and abroad, welcome and agreeable."

Disraeli's service in the second political office of England was but brief, for the first Derby cabinet survived but seven months. But in that brief period he displayed qualities of statesmanship and leadership that he had not before been supposed to possess.

He led his party, as chief of the government in the House of Commons, with masterly tact and skill; he managed the finances as if figures had always been his forte; and when he presented the annual budget, he displayed a remarkable clearness and soundness that showed how careful and effective a study he had made of fiscal science.

Throughout the coalition ministry of the Earl

of Aberdeen—through the exciting period of the Crimean War—through the first administration of Lord Palmerston, Disraeli still led, gallantly and pertinaciously, the Tory opposition in the lower House. Finally, in March, 1858, the Palmerston government, defeated on the "conspiracy to murder" bill, was compelled to retire, and once more the Tories came in, with Lord Derby as Premier, and Disraeli as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

This time, they made a desperate effort to hold on to power: Disraeli brought out a masterpiece of a budget; the cabinet, although Tory, brought forward a reform bill, which the Liberal cabinets had failed to do. The country, however, was not yet with them; their reform bill failed, and after administering the government a little more than a year, they retired in June, 1859, giving place in turn to Lord Palmerston.

There was another long shady era for the Tories, from '59 to '66. But Disraeli, the lieutenant and unresting ally of Derby, the Tory chief, never lost heart, but worked assiduously to effect union in the Tory ranks, and to deliver continual assaults on the ministry. Lord Palmerston, although nominally a Liberal, was known to be hostile to reform; and, by reason of his personal popularity in England, and his wonderful capacity for conciliating divergent views, during his lifetime he succeeded in ignoring that great question. The venerable Premier died, in full posses-

sion of his mental faculties, at more than eighty, in the autumn of 1865; and his veteran lieutenant, himself past seventy, Earl Russell, became Prime-Minister.

It was evident that the reform question could no longer be avoided; so Lord Russell and Mr. Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer, brought a reform bill into Parliament in May, 1866.

The discussion was long and violent; the Liberals in the House of Commons began to show a deplorable want of harmony, and finally, upon an amendment of Lord Dunkellin, the cabinet was defeated, in July, 1866, by five majority in a very full house. Russell and Gladstone, indignant that the blow should come from their own side, where less than a year before there had been a Liberal majority of at least sixty votes, resigned.

The only alternative was a return of the Derby party, led in the Commons by the indefatigable and unsubduable Disraeli. Lord Derby became, for the third time, Prime-Minister, the adventurous Jewish novelist a third time Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The new cabinet found itself face to face with a very grave state of affairs. The agitation in the country on the question of electoral reform was very great, and reached a dangerous height in the autumn of 1866. Monster meetings were held in the large cities, and leagues were formed, with the avowed object of forcing, by popular

pressure, a large concession of reform from the Tory ministers. The Tories had just voted against the Gladstone reform as too democratic; they had denounced it as ruinous; Lord Lytton had declared it revolutionary. Yet now public opinion would not accept any other than a reform which should far surpass that of Gladstone.

Here were the Tories in office; they had long lived in the cold shade of opposition, deprived of those sweets of office which they were now enjoying; they could only remain by either coming to a direct issue with the agitation, thus endangering civil war, or, belying all their party traditions and latest declarations, concede a greater reform than that which they had opposed.

There can be no doubt that Disraeli, and he alone, saved the Tory cabinet and the Tory party at this juncture. A bold and audacious, and, as the event proved, sagacious statesman, utterly indifferent to taunt or menace, he proposed to his patrician followers that they should adopt a policy of "household suffrage." It was a hazardous thing to attempt to persuade the aristocratic party to turn its back on its whole previous career, and adopt a measure that was nothing if not revolutionary; yet more hazardous, perhaps, to suggest it to the country. Possibly Disraeli, with a leaven of his old-time radicalism left, enjoyed, as one having a profound sense of the ridiculous, the perplexity of his ducal and baronial partisans;

he may have felt a sweetness of revenge—revenge for all those slights and sneers of years gone by —when he thrust so unwelcome a morsel down their throats.

He showed them that the choice lay between conceding household suffrage and perpetual, or at least long-continued, ostracism from the delights of office. He cajoled, flattered, threatened them by turns; and at last convinced a majority of the most haughty cabinet that has sat in Downing Street for half a century to take what Lord Derby so pathetically called "a leap in the dark." Derby himself reluctantly gave way before his colleague's enthusiasm; and the Dukes of Marlborough, Richmond, and Buckingham, followed his example. Of the cabinet, three members alone—Lords Salisbury and Carnarvon, and General Peel—refused to take the "leap," and retired from office; with them, it is probable, a motive of intense personal dislike to Disraeli actuated their course as much as their hostility to his measure.

He smiled placidly when they withdrew, and soon proved to them that they were unnecessary to his success. His triumph was now secure. With all his oratorical tact and fluency, the author of "Coningsby" introduced into the House of Commons one of the greatest achievements of his romantic political life—the Household Suffrage Reform Bill of 1867.

The debates that followed were prolific in

brilliant displays of parliamentary eloquence. Gladstone, Disraeli's life-long rival, galled to see himself cheated of the glory of accomplishing a great reform, and of all men in the world by Disraeli, burst forth in a torrent of hot and indignant declamation, and impetuously arraigned his successful antagonist for political theft and presumptuous ambition.

Disraeli, feeling the great prize in his palm, kept his temper finely, coolly taunted his rival, and entered confidently upon the task of winning a hesitating and doubting House.

Just a year after he had resumed the Exchequer, the Household Suffrage Bill was passed, and Disraeli was hailed as a benefactor to England, who had deserved well of the country, and was the hero of the hour.

XV.

It was in the autumn of this memorable year, 1867, that repeated attacks of the gout, and rapidly advancing age, admonished the chivalrous Tory chief, the Earl of Derby, that it was time for him to throw off the cares of office and the perplexities of power.

For a moment there was a doubt who should succeed him in the great office which confers vir-

tual sovereignty over the British Empire. Derby's son, Lord Stanley, a young statesman of such conspicuous talent that he had held the seals of the Foreign Office in his father's cabinet, was thought of, and was greatly preferred by the high aristocratic element of the Tory party.

But a consideration of palpable justice determined the question. The Tories, although unwillingly, were fain to acknowledge that of all men Disraeli had most efficiently borne the banner of Toryism for a score of years. It was also true that of all men he alone could conduct with success a Tory administration. Although distrusted by some, hated by others, personally liked by but few among his prominent colleagues, his services had been too great in the past, his abilities too great at present, to be slighted. It was known that he would never serve except as chief. He had waited long and patiently—had suffered more, worked harder, accomplished greater results, than any living Tory. England, then, was but little surprised when it was announced that the Queen had summoned Disraeli to an audience, and had designated him as Prime-Minister of England.

Disraeli's elevation to this lofty summit was remarkable in more than one respect. He was not the first Prime-Minister, indeed, not of aristocratic blood; but he was the first Prime-Minister of Jewish birth; thirty years before, he had cast a prophetic glance into the future, and

had determined that he would one day be Prime-Minister. It was like the poor Swiss youth, Clavière, who, entering Paris, and happening to pass the Ministry of Finance, was of a sudden struck with the presentiment that he should some time be its chief; it was like the prophecy of the old creole hag to Josephine in her infancy, that she would one day be "more than a queen." But Disraeli was by no means the first Prime-Minister who was a man of letters. His immediate predecessor, the Earl of Derby, gave to the world an elegant version of Homer's Iliad. The minister who preceded Derby, Earl Russell, is known in the literary world as the author of "The Life of Fox," and of many able political essays. Canning, too, was a literary man.

Of modern statesmen with whom Disraeli has found himself sitting in the House of Commons, many, perhaps a majority, of the more prominent were cultivators of letters. Macaulay and Bulwer were members of the cabinet at different periods. Gladstone is only less celebrated as a Greek scholar and a powerful writer than as an orator and statesman. John Stuart Mill, one of the greatest of English philosophers; Layard, the antiquarian; Hughes, the author of "Tom Brown;" R. Monckton Milnes, the poet; George Cornewall Lewis, an elegant essayist; and Lord Herbert, a man of varied literary accomplishments, have been found side by side with the

Prime-Minister in the House of Commons during the past quarter of a century. Disraeli became Prime-Minister at the age of 62, his mind and body being at the height of their vigor, his energy still unimpaired, and his endurance equal to that of the youngest man in Parliament.

XVI.

Disraeli's first term as Prime-Minister was brief. Having established household suffrage, which virtually brought a new constituency into existence, he found it necessary to dissolve Parliament. The general election was held in the autumn of 1868, and resulted in an overwhelming majority for the Liberals ; and before the new Parliament met, Disraeli had resigned, and Gladstone had succeeded him.

At this moment the prospects of the Tory party seemed dark indeed. It looked as if they were doomed to a long sojourn outside the sunshine of power. Few would then have predicted that Disraeli, who was now sixty-three, would ever again wield the destinies of the empire. Gladstone's triumph seemed complete, and likely to be enduring.

But the spirit of the Tory chief was irrepressibly buoyant, and less than ever daunted. He

went jauntily to the task of leading a forlorn hope of opposition, and abated not a jot of his vigor in attacking every weak place in the armor of his victorious, contemptuous, and hot-blooded rival.

Unluckily for Gladstone his armor was in too many places vulnerable. He led a party which, though its majority was great, and, when united, was irresistible in the Commons, was divided into several camps and coteries, which looked upon each other with jealousy and suspicion. The Liberals were never compact and harmonious as an organization, like the Tories ; and, while Gladstone held their allegiance by the splendor of his genius and the boldness of his measures, he was quite wanting in the tact and temper by which his antagonist maintained the order and discipline of his followers.

The Liberal majority, therefore, decreased every year ; Gladstone saw it fast crumbling away ; and his measures, intended to keep them together, only had the effect to widen the breaches.

It was while this process of disintegration was fast going on, that Disraeli once more displayed his audacity, and produced one more of those striking dramatic effects which have been so frequent in his political career, by visiting and delivering an address in the very midst of his enemy's camp, the Radical town of Manchester. Here, where have been born so many of the reforms

which have gradually been adopted in England during the past half century, the vicinity of John Bright's home, and John Bright's former constituency, Disraeli ventured to sharply attack the cabinet of which probably three quarters of his audience were cordial supporters.

He arraigned Gladstone for his missteps in domestic legislation, and the feebleness of his foreign policy; and declared that, by modifying the treaty of Paris to please Russia, the cabinet, "in the form of a congress, had guaranteed its own humiliation." Speaking then of the future tactics of the Tories, he betrayed all his own shrewdness as a party leader by saying: "If I may venture to give such a hint, let us take care not to allow ourselves to be made to any extent the tools of the ambition or of the discontent of extreme politicians on either side. I will tell you what I mean. It may very likely be the game of the Radical party to try and turn out the present ministry if they can, and to put a Conservative government in its place, that Conservative government being in a minority; hoping that by so doing they shall be able to reconstruct their own party upon a new platform, pledged to more extreme and more violent measures, and then to have a cabinet formed of the most thorough-going Radicals. These may be their tactics; but just because it is their game, it ought not to be ours."

The downfall of Gladstone, owing to the melt-

ing away of his once great majority, was not long postponed. The really fatal blow to his cabinet, though it did not fully take effect for a year, was the dissension in the Liberal ranks aroused by Gladstone's scheme of Irish university reform.

In one of the great debates upon this measure Disraeli took a brilliant part, in which he showed that he still retained, in all its force, that power of masterly invective which, nearly thirty years ago, he had launched against Gladstone's political teacher, Sir Robert Peel. In the course of his speech, he drew himself up, and, riveting his eyes upon the restless Premier, said :

"You have now had four years of it. You have despoiled churches, you have threatened every corporation and every endowment in the country. You have examined into everybody's affairs, you have criticised every profession and vexed every trade. Nobody is certain of his property ; nobody knows what duties he may have to perform to-morrow."

The result was the defeat of the cabinet by three votes. Gladstone at once resigned. Disraeli was summoned to the Queen at Windsor, as he was entering the House of Commons. But he refused to return to power and face a hostile House of Commons. With his wise patience, he was content to bide his time. With his clear forecast, he foresaw that, sooner or later, he should win the game.

A year after, Gladstone, who had reluctantly resumed the premiership after Disraeli's refusal, found that he could no longer carry on the government with a party so obstreperous and unmanageable as the Liberals had become. He therefore suddenly dissolved Parliament early in 1874, and an exciting general election at once ensued.

It was during this hot electoral contest that Disraeli uttered a sarcasm upon Mr. Lowe, who had long been one of his most persistent and virulent foes, which alike illustrates his keenness and his humor. It had been complained of that London University, which Mr. Lowe represented in Parliament, should have a member. Disraeli, in a speech at Newport, thus alluded to the matter: "Were it not for me the London University would not have had a member. Everybody was opposed to it. My colleagues did not much like it; the Conservative party did not much like it; but, more strange than anything else, the whole Liberal party were ready to oppose it. But I, with characteristic magnanimity, said to myself, 'Unless I give a member to the London University Mr. Lowe cannot have a seat.' It was then impossible for him, and probably still is, to show himself upon any hustings with safety to his life. I said to myself, 'There is so much ability lost to Enggland,' and I pique myself always upon upholding and supporting ability in every party, and wherever I meet it; and I also said to myself, 'One

must have an eye to the main chance. If I keep Mr. Lowe in public life—and this is his only chance—I make sure that no cabinet, if it be brought into power by an overwhelming majority, can long endure and long flourish if he be a member of it ;' and, gentlemen, I think what took place perfectly justified my prescience."

He had good reason to assume this tone of not ill-natured jocularity ; for the signs in the political heavens were full of auguries favorable to a great Tory triumph. To Disraeli's exultation, and Gladstone's indignant dismay, the country sent to the new House a Tory majority of sixty ; and Disraeli once more, in the spring of 1874, became Prime-Minister of England, which office he has continued to hold from that day to this.

XVII.

As Prime-Minister, Disraeli has been still resolute, dramatic, brilliant, impressing his own forcible character upon any measure ; bold in the conception and execution of policies ; masterly in party leadership ; patient under the most violent vituperation ; delighting in the full exercise of the power which the command of a large majority of both Houses of Parliament has enabled him to wield from first to last.

His premiership, like his early public career, has been a political romance. Who else, in all the long roll of British statesmanship, would have produced such startling surprises, such scenic effects, such audacious transformations? To purchase a controlling share in the Suez Canal, to hail the Queen as Empress of India, to send the fleet into the waters of Constantinople, to acquire Cyprus, were acts of daring, which only a courageous and self-confident spirit, fond of striking displays of power, could have successfully executed.

The period of his power fell upon dangerous and perplexing times. The skeleton in the closet of Europe, the Eastern question, reappeared to bring terror into every court and cabinet council. A timid statesman might well have shrunk from confronting it. To lay this periodically-appearing phantom was a task which a statesman, doubtful of himself, might well have sought to avoid.

But Disraeli, amid a storm of popular denunciation, went to this task jauntily, with a "light heart;" the fruit of his policy was the treaty of Berlin; and he transformed the unpopularity with which he seemed at one time about to be overwhelmed into something very like adulation. "On all hands," says an English writer, "his name was coupled with disparaging epithets, and his personal character assailed with the grossest calumny. Even the journals of his own party—

confessedly not the most intelligent organs of public opinion in existence—wavered in their allegiance, and when he announced plainly that the 'interests of England' held the first place in his mind, there was a general outcry against his insensibility to the enthusiasm of humanity. Gradually, but certainly, however, public opinion veered in the direction of the statesman who has best in this century exemplified the truth of Mr. Carlyle's favorite proposition that, if 'speech is silvern, silence is golden.' Without any striving or crying out, without any public meetings or letters to the journals, or post-cards to anxious constituents, Lord Beaconsfield succeeded in winning the people of this country over to his side. By a policy equally bold and prudent, he secured the support of the nation; and when the prospects of an amicable settlement of existing difficulties appeared to be darkest, he took a step which drove from his side the two weakest members of his cabinet, and left him free to pursue the courageous line of action which has given to this country the greatest treaty since the peace of Utrecht—a treaty which assures the interests of England in the Ottoman Empire, which provides for the safety and good government of the Christian subjects of the Porte, and which guarantees, as never has been guaranteed before, our Indian Empire against Russian aggression."

It was undoubtedly a proud day when, in the

early winter of 1877, Benjamin Disraeli walked up the aisle of the House of Lords, enveloped in the robes and bearing upon his head the coronet of an earl. Of all the events of his checkered career, this was perhaps the most remarkable and the most gratifying to his imaginative nature. To be an hereditary peer of the realm; to sit as an equal beside the proud nobles who had once so contemptuously scorned and snubbed him; to outrank patricians who could trace their descent from the barons of William the Norman; to be the visible leader and chief of archbishops, dukes, and marquises; to find himself the principal personage in the haughtiest assembly in the world: this was glory enough to satisfy even his vast ambition. Nor was this the last of the dazzling titular honors which his toils and triumphs have won. When he returned from the Prussian capital, where he had been the central and conspicuous figure, and by his voice had made the authority of England felt in the most distinguished conclave of modern times, as impressively as did Gortchakoff that of Russia, and Bismarck that of Germany, he was welcomed back to London with such a demonstration as had not been seen since Wellington returned from Waterloo.

The Queen, summoning him to Osborne, conferred upon him that Order of the Garter which is an object coveted by the most illustrious of England's nobles.

It is a suggestive fact that Disraeli, transferred to the serener arena of the House of Lords, did not thereby lose any of the personal power and influence which he so long wielded in the more popular and more authoritative House. When William Pitt became Earl of Chatham, and Robert Walpole became Earl of Orford, they were the shorn Samsons of British politics. When a commoner is transferred to the peers, he is usually regarded as "laid on the shelf."

It has not been so with the present Premier. The Earl of Beaconsfield is as much the real, moving head of the cabinet and of Parliament as was Disraeli. Their policy is still emphatically *his* policy. It is his hand that is always on the rudder of the ship of state; the impress of his peculiar, energetic, audacious mind is on every great public act.

He has, besides, during a period in which he has been assailed with a degree of persistent ferocity and denunciation such as few English statesmen have ever had to encounter, not only maintained his majority in the House of Commons, but he has increased it. He was much stronger after he had been in power for four years than when he first assumed it; and this is one of the rarest things in the history of British politics.

His achievements as Premier, indeed, are enough to establish the fame of any one statesman. "He

began life," says a recent writer, "under almost every conceivable disadvantage. He was the representative of an unpopular race and the advocate of an eminently unpopular political creed; in later years he has been in opposition to two of the most popular of English statesmen; and yet, in spite of every difficulty, he has contrived to live down his opponents, and by dint of patience, courage, inexhaustible temper, and knowledge of the world, to reconstruct the old national party of England, and to restore her waning prestige. Still, it may be open to question whether posterity will recognize him by the title he has adopted. Bacon is Bacon to the end of the chapter, and never Lord Verulam; the Great Commoner is Pitt, and never the Earl of Chatham. So probably will it be now. His country will remember the Earl of Beaconsfield by the name by which he was known during so many years of struggle and difficulty, rather than by the title with which he strove to identify himself in the eyes of his neighbors with his 'perfect wife.' The desire to do so was unquestionably natural, but to the people of that country which he has served so faithfully and loved so well the chief of the Tory party will be always not Lord Beaconsfield, but Benjamin Disraeli."

XVIII.

The personal appearance of a famous man, the way he looks and acts, his peculiarities, attitudes, mannerisms, are always interesting, and serve to complete the picture of his character. The idea conceived of him is clearer and more precise if his person is described; we feel that we know him better; his image is more distinct in the mind's eye.

How Disraeli looked and dressed and bore himself when he was the young and brilliant *protégé* of Gore House, we have already seen. As he advances in years, we get here and there a glimpse of him through those who observed and have written of him from time to time.

"His external appearance," says Smiles, writing in 1860, when Disraeli was fifty-five, "is very characteristic. A face of ashy paleness, large dark eyes, curling black hair, a stooping gait, an absorbed look, a shuffling walk—these are his external marks; and, once seen, you will not fail to remember Disraeli. There is something unusual, indeed quite foreign, in his appearance; you could not by any possibility mistake him for a Saxon. Notwithstanding his position, he is an exceedingly isolated being. He makes no intimates, has few personal friends; he seems to be

lonely and self-isolated, feeding upon his own thoughts."

"Disraeli is full of pluck and vigor this session," wrote Justin McCarthy in 1871, "quite jubilant and confident. He still looks wonderfully young, despite his awkward, shuffling, slinking walk, and his stooped shoulders. A few evenings since I saw him pass along Parliament Street, leaning on two friends. Everybody looked after him. He is a much more remarkable figure in the street than Gladstone or Bright. Let me describe him as he then showed:

"A tall man, with stooped and rounded shoulders; a peculiarly-shaped head, fast denuding itself of hair, but with the hair that remains still black as ever; a complexion of dull brick-dust; a face puckered up like an old mask, or as if the wearer of the face were always screwing up his lips to whistle, and never accomplished the feat. A small chin-tuft adorns the countenance; and let me add that the expression on the countenance is lugubrious enough to become an artistic and conscientious mute at a funeral.

"A long gray or white outer coat reaches nearly to the ankles of this remarkable figure, and beneath the coat might be seen trousers of a dark gray, and very neat boots. There was something of the air of a decayed and fading dandy about the entire personage, which, joined with the odd walk, and the stooped shoulders, and the chill

gray atmosphere of the early evening, diffused a sense of gloom over the meditative spectator.

"Was this, then, the brilliant, eccentric, and dashing man of genius, who used to be the cynosure of eyes in Lady Blessington's bright *salons*, who wrote 'Vivian Grey,' and came out as a wild radical, and proclaimed that revolution was his *forte*, and challenged O'Connell to a duel, and heard the chimes ever so long past midnight with the elderly gentleman now vegetating at Chiselhurst, who was then Prince Louis Napoleon?

"Yes, that was he. 'There goes old Dizzy,' said a working man, as the great politician, romancist, and adventurer, shuffled along."

In the following year he appeared as follows to an observant writer:

"A man of middle height, of spare but well-proportioned frame, of scrupulous neatness of dress, and possessed of a countenance which no one can forget who has once looked upon it—this is Disraeli, as we see him now quietly walking up the floor of the House to take his place on the front Opposition bench.

"Arrived at his seat, he removes his hat—he alone among the gentlemen upon that bench—and sits down, folding his arms and stretching out his legs in a fashion which recalls by-gone days, when, out of every twenty honorable gentlemen in the House, nineteen of them stretched out their legs in exactly the same way.

"Over the high-arched forehead—surely the forehead of a poet—there hangs from the crown of the head a single curl of dark hair, a curl which you cannot look at without feeling a touch of pathos in your inmost heart, for it is the only thing about the worn and silent man reminding you of the brilliant youth of 'Vivian Grey.'

"The face below this solitary lock is deeply marked with the furrows left by care's ploughshare; the fine dark eyes look downward, the mouth is closed with a firmness that says more for this man's tenacity of will than pages of eulogy would do; but what strikes you more than anything else is the utter lack of expression upon the countenance.

"No one looking at the face, though but for a moment, could fall into the error of supposing that expression and intelligence are not there; they are there, but in concealment.

"Much is said of the power possessed by Napoleon III. of hiding his thoughts from the keenest scrutiny; but more than once even his power over his countenance has been sorely taxed, and he has been glad of the grateful shelter of the curling mustache that shades his mouth.

"Without any such help, however, Disraeli has a face that is simply inscrutable. Again and again have hundreds of keen eyes been turned at critical moments toward that face, to read, if it might be possible, something of the thoughts

of the man himself; but never once, not even in the most exciting crisis of personal or political conflict, has the face unwittingly relaxed, or friend or foe been able to read aught there.

"It is the face of a sphinx, inscrutable and unfathomable; it is, as men of every party will admit, the most remarkable face in England.

"We have dwelt thus long upon it because, by its very absence of outward expression, it gives a clew to the general character of the man himself. It is not for us to attempt to sound the depths of his soul. They are beyond the reach of our plummet, nay, of any plummet that has yet been dropped into them. There have been many men—a few friends, a vast number of foes—who have imagined that they have dived down into the innermost recesses of Disraeli's nature, and who have come to the surface again to tell us about everything that they saw there, to explain every hidden motive, each smothered passion, and to reduce the man himself to a mere piece of mechanism—an automaton chess-player—whose motive power, and springs, and wheels, and wires, are to be discovered by any one who will take the trouble to look for them. We intend to be guilty of no such folly.

"Disraeli's mind is no more to be analyzed than his countenance is to be fathomed. He is here; we know what he has done, we have seen his labors, we acknowledge his genius, we believe him

to be intellectually one of the greatest men not of his own time only but of all English history. Beyond that we cannot go, and we must leave to future critics, who will see him through a clearer medium than that through which it is possible for us to behold him, and who may have new lights thrown upon his character which are withheld from us, to decide what he is, and what precisely is the motive power of his life. All that we know at present is that he is an intellectual prodigy, and, like other prodigies, he must be tried by exceptional rules and standards."

A graphic picture of Disraeli, as he appeared in the House of Commons seven or eight years ago, is thus given by Ewing Ritchie :

"Seated on the Opposition benches, half-way down, with some small-brained son of a duke by his side, night after night, may be seen the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. Generally, his eyes are cast down, his hands are crossed in front, and he has all the appearance of a statue. Cold, passionless, he seems of an alien race—a stranger to the hopes, and fears, and interests of a British House of Commons. However fierce the debate, or heated the House, or pressing the crisis, there sits Disraeli, occasionally looking at his hands, or the clock—otherwise silent, unmoved, and still. Yet an Indian scout could not keep a more vigilant watch ; and, immediately an opportunity occurs, he is on his legs, boiling with real or affected indignation."

XIX.

In private character, Disraeli is known for his social accomplishments, his equable and amiable temper, his freedom from anything like *hauteur*, his courtesy to every one, and an air of quiet dignity which is very far from repelling the advances of those who come in contact with him.

One of his most hostile and most caustic critics says of him: "Disraeli, in private, is much liked. He is very kindly; he is a good friend; he is sympathetic in his dealings with young politicians, and is always glad to give a helping hand to a young man of talent. Personal ambition, which, in Mr. Bright's eyes, is something despicable, and which Mr. Gladstone probably regards as a sin, is, in Disraeli's acceptation, something generous and elevating, something to be fostered and encouraged. Therefore, young men of talent admire Disraeli, and are glad and proud to gather around him."

"Of Disraeli's personal qualities," says a more friendly observer, "apart from those which he displays as a debater, a party-leader, or a statesman, this is not the place in which to say much. Nevertheless, it is bare justice to a man who has been the subject of a severer and more merciless criticism than any of his contemporaries, to point

to one or two of the most prominent traits of his private character. Watching him in his public career, he always strikes one as a man of singular reserve ; a man having few confidential friends, and seldom indulging in free intercourse even with his immediate colleagues.

"The popular impression of him, indeed, is that he is a man without friends, laboring alone, and holding himself aloof from those who are his natural allies. We believe this impression is an entirely mistaken one. It is, at any rate, certain that, personally, Disraeli is one of the most popular men in the House of Commons, winning upon politicians of all shades of opinion by his never-failing courtesy, by his generosity toward those who are beginning their political career, and by the utter absence of anything like personal vanity in his character. Nor is it unworthy of remark that toward Gladstone he has always shown a degree of personal esteem, and of actual generosity, which has never been requited by the latter as fully as we could have wished.

"What the reason of this apparent want of generosity on Gladstone's part may be, it is difficult to tell. Assuredly, Gladstone is not, as a rule, cold or ungenerous toward his rivals or opponents, but there is in his bearing toward Disraeli an unquestionable coldness which has often puzzled those who know him best. To us it seems in some degree to be accounted for by the fact

that Gladstone entertains some doubt as to the sincerity of Disraeli's convictions.

"But, if that be so, his conduct is, to say the least, inconsistent. There are other men whose convictions are much more open to suspicion than Disraeli's, toward whom he shows none of this coldness. How high the personal feud between these two great statesmen has sometimes risen will be remembered by those who can recall one memorable occasion when Disraeli congratulated himself on the fact that the ponderous table of the House separated and in a measure protected him from his rival. Yet it is bare justice to Gladstone to recall another occasion when Disraeli, under, as it then appeared, the imminent pressure of a severe domestic affliction, was manifestly touched by the feeling and delicacy with which his great opponent alluded to his position. We only wish that such displays of mutual good-feeling were more common than they are.

"The great Conservative leader is a poet as well as a statesman. In the lightness of his fancy, in the depth of his feeling for the sufferings of others, in the catholicity of his sympathies, in his fine imaginative powers, and in his ability to invest the homeliest of topics with something of romance and of beauty, he gives proof of the pure vein of poetry hidden somewhere in his nature."

The New York *World* of November 1st, in giving a cable dispatch from London, correcting

a report from that city that Lord Beaconsfield had had an attack of epilepsy, adds from its English correspondence the following interesting sketch of his country seat in Buckinghamshire, Hughenden Manor:

"In his home at Hughenden what he most values would seem to be the privacy it insures him, and the sylvan seclusion with which it surrounds him when he seeks refuge there from the battle of life in London. Hughenden Manor is the estate not of an English earl exactly, for it yields at the most an income of some £1,500 sterling only a year, but of an English country gentleman; and it is no secret that the lord of Hughenden has throughout his career been notably earnest in asserting his right to be regarded as a person having roots in the English soil. The affront which he has always most sharply resented has been to speak of him as an 'adventurer,' for nothing could be more unjust, though many English writers not unfriendly to him have offered him this affront in perfect good faith. So little is known of Disraeli the man that a loose notion is common throughout England of his having obtained Hughenden through his marriage with Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, the widow of a Gloucestershire land-owner, and of his having in this way anchored himself for the first time in English ground. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the architectural section of the South Kensington Museum

you may see any day a singularly beautiful screen of carved brick-work tracery, unrivaled in England, which formerly constituted the central part of the façade of a house which stood where the Great Eastern Railway Station now stands in Enfield, and which was the residence from 1766 to to 1804 of Isaac Disraeli, the father of Lord Beaconsfield. It was one of the finest of the many fine old houses which made Enfield famous in its way long before the rifle-factories came there, and it was a mere chance connected with his marriage which led Isaac Disraeli to leave it just in time to rob Enfield of the glory of giving birth to his now illustrious son. When Benjamin Disraeli issued his first election address he was able to speak of himself as a land-owner in Berks, and to date it from 'Bradenham House.' This house, built by William Lord Windsor, and visited by Queen Elizabeth on her return from Oxford in 1566, was long the home of Isaac Disraeli, who received there some of the best society of his day, and who now lies buried in Bradenham Church, under a handsome monument. It was Isaac Disraeli, too, who obtained Hughenden by fair purchase, though he did not buy the whole area of about two thousand acres included in the existing domain. Lord Beaconsfield, in fact, is quite as much of an Englishman and of an English squire by birth and descent as Lord Romilly, for instance, and much more of both than was the late Lord

Lyndhurst. Yet nothing could be more unlike an Englishman's or an English squire's enjoyment of a 'landed position' than Lord Beaconsfield's life at Hughenden. He has covers for game as good as may be found in Buckinghamshire, but he never shoots; he is in a good hunting country, if a little hilly, but he never follows a fox; he has a home 'bosomed high in tufted trees,' but he never led a pleasure party in among the beeches. But little company comes for him to the station of the little chair-making town of High Wycombe (or High Wykeham—you may spell it either way provided only you are careful never to pronounce it as you write it). Whatever gayety of the great flourishes here is by the grace of his neighbor, the newly-married Lord Carington, who was the Earl of Rosebery's best man last spring, and whose seat, 'The Abbey,' lies a little south of Wycombe on the Marlow road. For there is very little for company to do at Hughenden, which, by-the-way, these wonderful rustics choose to call 'Hitchendon.' Englishmen in these days will not long endure a country house without sport. The lord of Hughenden has learned much and feigned more to please them, but he will not 'pay with his person,' as the French say, for their admiration. He has drawn the line at the arts of riding across country and of handling the rod and the gun. This makes him the most extraordinary, the most uncanny

squire, perhaps, except that mad grandee of Spain, Bethell Walrond, who ever held a rood of English ground. To this day the neighborhood professes itself just as unable to make him out as Landor's vicinage was to get along with that strange poet at Llanthony. Lord Beaconsfield, unlike Landor, is admired ; he is even rather popular, for he is the most lenient because the most indifferent of landlords, but he is not in the least understood. What a pity, the rural folk seem to say to themselves, that he should have wellnigh all knowledge, except that supreme part of it which is necessary to social salvation and which is treated of in those supplementary chapters of the British Bible, the 'Sportsman's Pocket-Book' and the 'Country Gentleman's Guide!' For his part he lives among them like a foreigner on the lands he has conquered—as far removed from all participation in their local pleasures as an Englishman would be, settled among the Hindoos. One feature of Hughenden is supremely significant on this point. Nearly all the paths cut through the woods of the estate are drives, not walks, nor even bridle-roads. The Earl of Beaconsfield's way of getting from distant point to point is a pony-carriage. A 'real English' nobleman might indeed be found taking his exercise in a vehicle of that description, but it would be only because he had the gout upon him or had broken his leg! Lord Beaconsfield's early enemy, the late Duke

of Rutland, used to go shooting even when he was lamed with the gout, on a shaggy, vicious little pony. High Wycombe is reached by a railway ride of an hour and a half from London. As you leave the station you strike the Hughenden road at once, and in a very few minutes you come in sight of a white house-top peeping out of a dense plantation or natural wood. That is Hughenden Manor in its hiding-place of trees. The woodland is flanked by a wide stretch of meadow, and both are fenced in, so that you must pass the meadow gates to reach the park, and pass the park gates to reach the house. And even the first outwork is not to be lightly carried, as you may infer from the warning, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' set up almost at the outermost gate. But be not alarmed! These frowning syllables mean no more than such warnings usually do. Even the inner sanctum of foliage swarms with trespassers in the wild strawberry season. The estate is then invaded by the urchins of the district, who suffer no severer punishment than is involved in the stony stare of their sovereign's Prime-Minister when he happens to come upon them in a raid. The mere grass land is comfortless in the extreme in its aspect; it is only when you pass the second gate that you come upon the trim and ordered beauty of a private park. The abundance of timber has given the landscape gardener splendid material to work upon. Here he

has cleared a glade and there a little amphitheatre, and at needful distances for effect he has varied the greens and browns of the grass and the trees with patches of all the colors in which God has painted the flowers of the field. It is a very, very pretty place, and it is a pity that the house should be there to spoil it. For the house does spoil it. Hughenden Manor was once a not unpleasing eighteenth-century mansion of red brick. It never had many pretensions to architectural effect, but it might have 'passed muster' if it had been left in its original state. In an evil hour years ago, however, the owner took it into his head to have it smartened up 'for company,' and with his connivance a local genius whitened it all over with paint or lime color to that end. It now in consequence resembles a model factory rather more than anything else, and may be taken as another signal proof that the owner could not be quite English if he tried, though where he is under no obligation he does not care to try. The lawn, with its richly variegated flower-beds, tends somewhat to modify the depressing effect of the house, and the interior of the house soon makes you entirely forgetful of the exterior. Once within the doors, you see at a glance with what manner of man you have to deal. It is a house of memories rather than of tastes. The place is a positive museum of portraits, and most of these, as they represent the

friends of the owner's youth, are portraits of the dead and gone. The pictures begin at the hall door, they line the staircase walls, they overflow into every chamber and antechamber, and there is hardly one of them that is not a personal memento ; of landscapes, genre pictures, historical and ideal paintings, there are few or none. There is something pathetic and almost painful in this presence of so many faces that will never more greet Lord Beaconsfield with anything warmer than their pictured smiles. Here in the low-ceiled entry is Edward Lytton Bulwer in the day of his dandyism, a picture as carefully wrought out by the painter in boots and cuffs and collar as in the fine brow above them. Here is Lyndhurst, the great Tory Lord Chancellor, who was a friend and patron of Mr. Disraeli when Lord Beaconsfield was in urgent need of such countenance to commend him even to the attention of the party which now lives and moves in him. This portrait was painted by the young Disraeli's idol, D'Orsay, and opposite to it hangs the effigy of the artist and the idol himself—the Crichton of his time, the best dresser, the brightest wit, the most accomplished swordsman, painter, equestrian, and general highflyer perhaps ever seen in London society, and withal, as tradition assures us, the handsomest man, not only of a season, but of an epoch. It is conclusive as to his power that he should have enchanted one who has since been

recognized as the chief of enchanters, Disraeli himself. The young worshiper sat at his feet. There was nothing he would not have done for this glittering idol. There was, indeed, nothing he did not do for him. One chief secret of his early impecuniosity is now known ; he gave up the ready money left him by his father, some thousands of pounds, to help to pay D'Orsay's debts. It was but a drop in that ocean of liability, but it helped his hero through one bad quarter of an hour, and with that the devotee was content. Another canvas only separates D'Orsay from the Countess of Blessington—a brunette radiant with youthful beauty. Social history will always couple these two names together, and in its own way—though to the day of his death D'Orsay most solemnly swore that the mother of his unhappy wife was no more to him than a mother or a much-loved friend. Disraeli made his social *début* in London in the Blessington circle, and his associates there were the brightest men (the women never approached her) known to the world of her hour.

"A portrait of the young Disraeli, taken at this period, is to be seen up-stairs at Hughenden. A portrait of the Disraeli of to-day, copied from one painted but the other day for the Queen, is to be seen below. The difference is as saddening as it is striking. The earlier portrait is in the high Byronic manner. We have a drawing-room cor-

sair before us, with flashing eye, flowing locks, and an expression of wild devil-may-careishness carried out in it to the very twist of the tie. This was the Disraeli of the past, in one incarnation of fashion. In the other—the Beaconsfield of to-day—all the suppleness of line has vanished out of face and dress, the more obviously because the cheek is close-shaven. You feel yourself in the presence of a 'very hard customer,' who has parted with every illusion, and who no longer believes, with the original of the earlier picture, that life is an easy matter, to be carried with a rush. What the second face has gained, in the look of worldly wisdom, fails to make up, perhaps, for what it has lost in the look of confidence and hope. Near this later portrait hangs a still stronger contrast—the face of Byron, with its almost fabulous purity of classic outline. The original of this portrait, as everybody knows, was another of the young Disraeli's heroes, and the enthusiasm of his early admiration has survived to old age, as Lord Beaconsfield recently showed when he headed a movement for erecting a statue to the great English poet in the capital which has commemorated so many meaner and less-enduring fames than his. The genius of Byron, like that of Disraeli, was passionate rather than reflective. Disraeli's earliest successes may be almost described as a result of the application of the Byronic method to politics. Let Mr. Lowe say

what he will of the 'slatternly inaccuracy' of his rival's thought, its volume of fire has often more than made up for its lack of precision with an English multitude. Near Byron hangs Sir Nathaniel Rothschild, in his uniform of a yeomanry captain, the picture of a dandy who would be a perfect type of the British officer but for his swarthy face. The Rothschilds are Lord Beaconsfield's best and oldest friends. There is more than a community of race between them—there is a community of defiance to the prejudices of creed. They have made a social pact with Christendom —the Prime-Minister, of course, has gone even further than that—and the Rothschilds are now allying themselves with the best blood not only in the English but in the French aristocracy, to the great scandal of old-fashioned orthodoxy among the Jews. It is a kind of new dispensation, of which no hint is to be found in either the law or the prophets as they are read in the synagogues, but which obtains its sufficient sanction in society's approving smile.

"The staircase leads us to a dressing-room filled with more art treasures—a singularly fine collection of the engravings of Bartolozzi, whom Isaac Disraeli knew very well when he lived near Richardson's old home at North End. These things, however, may indicate rather the taste of the father than the taste of the son. Beyond the dressing-room is a little narrow slip of a chamber,

lined on one side with book-shelves. In this room the secretaries of the Premier's secretaries work during the two or three months of the year in which the business of state is carried on at Hughenden instead of in the old official residence in Downing Street. Lord Beaconsfield's favorite and most trusted private secretary, Mr. Montagu Corry, who is not only his secretary but his devoted personal friend, of course works with his chief in a small study on this landing, in which portraits of Isaac Disraeli and his wife look down, as in a happy dream, from the mantel-piece on the world-embracing labors of their son. You must come down again to the lower floor for the best rooms in the house. The dining-room may be reckoned among these by virtue of its uses, but in no other respect. It is as bare and comfortless almost as a monastic refectory, and resembles one rather than a convivial chamber.

"In the matter of gastronomy, Disraeli has always been as careless and abstemious as an Arab. His official dinners, from the time when he first became Chancellor of the Exchequer, are remembered with a sort of anguish by all the *bons vivants* who were compelled to go through with them. A story still goes the rounds of the first of these banquets, at which one course after another came upon the table either tepid or frigid, chilly fish following cold soup, and a lukewarm roast supervening, until the time of the ices came,

when appeared a leaning tower of Pisa, toppling to its fall in a pool of deliquescent rosy cream. 'Thank Heaven!' murmured a discontented guest, in a stage-whisper, 'there's something warm, at last!'

"The style of the Hughenden dining-room is Gothic, but, unfortunately, it is what may be called the secondary Walpolian Gothic of thirty or forty years ago. The oak sideboard is the best thing in the room, but that is so much like a communion table that it must seem indecent to decant anything upon it but sacramental wine. It stands in a side chapel rather than a common recess—the taste of a former occupant of the house having led him to reproduce a bit of the architecture of his college at Oxford on this part of the building. One wall is adorned with medallions in marble, brought from Pompeii—character sketches, if not caricatures, of the great ones of the old city. The other walls would be quite bare but for the slender lines of oak paneling which run from ceiling to floor. The comfort which we are taught to look for in every English home is found for the first time in the library. This apartment is half a library and half a drawing-room. There are plenty of tomes, but no dust. The light is abundant, and it falls as often on brilliant hangings as on sober bindings; and evidently no hangings are too brilliant for the taste of the occupant. Rich Oriental yellows predominate in the decora-

tions, but there is an Oriental harmony in the fittings of the apartment, taken as a whole. The bookbinder's lines of gold on the volumes here and there catch up and carry out the color, as an artist would say, from one end of the room to the other, and the place is filled with bits of bric-à-brac which serve the same end. Yonder huge knife in its case of gold is one of the owner's memorials of Eastern travel. He was but a boy then, and he had a marked boy's taste for these glittering toys. Copies of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, lying on the table, show if not the tastes at least the necessities of his maturer age. These two numbers are the very last books he has been consulting. The paper-knife marks them. The reader has but just left them, to take them up again when he returns to the room. Evidently, the hero of the Berlin Congress desires to see what his neighbors think of his Eastern policy—who was it put about the story that Lord Beaconsfield knows no French? Another lie gone the way of the rest! Here, as everywhere in this interesting but melancholy house, are pictures of friends dead and gone. That of the poet Rogers hanging by the mantel-piece is but a pencil-sketch, amateurish, yet not without merit. It at least does full justice to that nose and chin which, according to Byron, 'would shame a knocker.' Rogers was a very early friend of Disraeli, perhaps his earliest. It was he who took the boy to

be baptized, at St. Andrew's, Holborn, and, in thus giving him his start in Protestant Christianity, gave him also his start in English political life. There are other sketches, more amateurish still, of which the master of the house is the subject, as he appeared when receiving an honorary degree at a Scotch university. The lady who drew them did not spare him. They show enough feminine malice, if not enough artistic ability, for *Punch*. His lordship seems to be quite conscious how exquisitely ludicrous he looks in his baggy robe of dignity, and with his demure, downcast eye. Presentation books lie about on the tables. One of them, a trophy from Berlin, is a beautifully printed and as beautifully bound edition of the Psalms in German, weighing several pounds. A slip of paper thrust between the leaves says that it is from an admirer—there is no other clew to the giver's name. Near it lies a copy of the parliamentary return of land-owners in England and Wales, the modern 'Domesday Book' brought down to date. It is handsomely bound, and an inscription on the cover mentions that the return was moved for by Mr. Disraeli. It did not exactly answer his purpose, which was to prove that the ownership of the soil of England was far more equably distributed among the people than was supposed. For, if it showed that Mr. Bright had monstrously overstepped the Radical case, it also showed that the few have too

much land and the many too little. Perhaps Mr. Disraeli had better have left it alone. But he has never troubled himself much about deluges in the great hereafter.

"From the library we pass into the drawing-room, commanding, like most of the other apartments, beautiful views of the fertile uplands with their ridge of woods. It is very gorgeous in its glow of gold and yellow satin. The parqueted floor is in the French style. French, too, in taste, is the abundance of figure-subjects in old china, though these are mostly of Dresden ware. This might be called the Queen's room, for the Queen sat in it on her memorable visit to her favorite minister a year or so ago—a visit of a couple of hours, but it made Russia and Germany understand his hold on power, and it will be remembered in this rural neighborhood for ten times as many years. This room abounds with evidences of her royal favor to the man who has made her something more than a queen, and whose enemies, indeed, accuse him of making her an empress in England as well as in India by liberating her from the critical control of Parliament, and accepting her will as the nation's law. In the place of honor among the pictures hangs the portrait of Her Majesty, painted by command. On the table lies a ponderously bound copy of Theodore Martin's 'Faust,' with the inscription on the fly-leaf in a handwriting beautifully clear and bold: 'To

Lord Beaconsfield, with many happy returns of the season, from Victoria, Reg. and I. (*Regina et Imperatrix*). Christmas Eve, 1876.' Here, too, lies a more popular tribute, the 'pair of ivory carvers' (the fork almost big enough to form a trident for Britannia, and the knife to match) given by the workmen of Sheffield in acknowledgment, as is told in an inscription on the handle, of the 'Peace with Honor' brought back from Berlin. There could be no better tools for the dismembering of that prince of farm-yard birds, the turkey. Let us hope the Sheffield workmen never thought of this. From the drawing-room we may pass to the Disraeli room, a bed-chamber of state hung round with pictures of the family. There is Disraeli the elder, as a boy with large dark Jewish eyes, and as a man. The portrait of his wife, the great man's mother, is now a mere network of lines of decay on a cracked canvas. Their gifted son, too, is seen here as a boy and as a young man. A portrait of his grandfather, the Venetian, who made the family fortune in England more than a century and a half ago, completes the collection. These elders both are dignified figures, tending to show that

> 'St. Patrick was a gentleman,
> And came of decent people.'

"But why linger longer in the house? A view of Hughenden Church, from the windows, invites

us out of doors. The church is old, but so bare of ornamentation that, were it not for that equally bare pew in the chancel, 'where he sits,' I grieve to say it would be little more interesting than the newest meeting-house in town. 'He' sits in no sort of pomp, and that is to his credit; but for its position, there would be little to distinguish his line of board from that occupied by the worshipers from his rustic almshouse at the gate. The Young England theory has left its mark on rural life, if not on political history. In the almshouse, the infirm poor live in the very shadow of the manor. It is a sort of preserve of charity, another of 'the curiosities.' You step out of the hall door, and you have hardly done admiring the tame peacocks on the terrace before you find yourself wondering at still tamer men who are glad to owe the comfort of their evening of life to the bounty of their lord. Well, well, if they do not mind it, why should you? The graves of the Disraeli family lie outside the church, at the altar end. They are very plain—three grass-grown spaces perfectly flat, or rather one broad space divided by lines of masonry. On one side lies James Disraeli, that younger brother of Lord Beaconsfield who lived and died in the tolerably lucrative office of a Commissioner of Inland Revenue. His portrait in official costume is in the house. The face is a clew to the history. It is that of a mild, harmless man, without any striking gift but that best one of all—the

gift of knowing when one is well off. No swimmer himself, this brother quietly held on to the other's skirts in the sea of Fortune, and with well-founded confidence, for Beaconsfield's stroke was strong enough for two. In fact, it was strong enough for three. Ralph Disraeli, another brother, owes his comfortable place also, as Clerk of the Parliaments, to the head of the house ; and he has gracefully acknowledged the debt by giving the name of Coningsby to his only son, born on the eve of Lord Beaconsfield's greatest political triumphs. On the other side of James Disraeli lies a stranger to the family circle, who yet has a right to the place. This is Mrs. Brydges-Wyllyams, of Torquay, a lady who made Mr. Disraeli the heir to her estate of some £30,000 sterling, out of her profound admiration for his genius. The story is stranger than any fiction. Mr. Disraeli years ago received an anonymous letter asking him to meet the writer on a certain day in the nave of Westminster Abbey. He showed it to his wife, laughingly, and threw it aside. Shortly afterward he received another letter in the same handwriting, and without opening it thrust it into a pocket of his coat. There it was found, and handed to him by his valet. He opened it, when out fell a £1,000 Bank-of-England note. Naturally enough he examined the letter which came to him so handsomely recommended. It proved to be from an elderly lady who lamented his failure to come to

the Abbey, expressed her earnest desire to make him her heir, and begged only that she might see and speak with him while she yet lived. The result was a visit regularly paid to Mrs. Wyllyams twice a year for several years, a will making Mr. Disraeli her heir, and an agreement on his part that she should be laid at rest after her death among the Disraelis at Hughenden.

"Not much more is known of Mrs. Brydges-Wyllyams, though the family is rather a conspicuous one in Cornwall, where one of its members led a Liberal attack on a Conservative seat only the other day in vain. It is her sole and doubtless, as she would have considered, her all-sufficient record. She was of no great mark in life, but she took measures to attain in death to a kind of companionship with one who, in her opinion, was the greatest man of his age. One is tempted to think that she must have judged him rightly, if only because he inspired such devotion. This verdict of a woman's worship is, in some sort, more convincing than that of the bellicose enthusiasm of the mob. And it was no solitary instance, as we are reminded by a glance at the central compartment of turf, where lies that 'Viscountess Beaconsfield in her own right,' whose devotion to the present solitary bearer of the title was as touching and as romantic as anything in mediæval romance. The fortune left her by her first husband gave the second one the

means of pushing his way in the political world. He lost the use of it at her death under the terms of Mr. Wyndham Lewis's will; and, in spite of the timely legacy of Mrs. Brydges-Wyllyams, he is at this moment, to his honor be it said, almost a poor man—certainly anything but a rich one. Before his late return to power he was one of the few ex-Premiers of England who have felt themselves obliged to accept the allowance of £2,000 a year, to which they are entitled when out of office. Disraeli has always sought fortune in the higher sense of glory and fame; and when it has come to him as pelf it has been by the pure favor of the goddess and not by his own exertions. His life-long devotion to his wife would be enough to prove, were any one impertinent enough to doubt it, that her jointure was not her attraction in his eyes. 'They was like a pair of turtle-doves, they was,' says the head gardener as he shows you through the shrubberies, cultivated by her constant care to suit her husband's taste. 'They was like that to the last day of their lives. They would spend whole days out here together in the summer time, and it was her delight to take him to see things which she had done to please him unbeknown. If she thought he'd like to have a clearer view of the meadows she'd have openings cut in the woods. She used to tell me to do it on the quiet, and when it was all done she'd lead him to the spot. Do you see that monnyment

yonder on the hill? Well, it's put up in memory of my lord's father, him that wrote the book; and my lady did it all of her own accord. She had the plans made and set the masons to work without sayin' a word to him about it; and then she takes him out one fine afternoon, and says he, "What's that?" "Let's go see," says she, with a smile; and when they got near it he stood and looked at her for a full minute without speakin' a word. I've heerd as how he cried, but not havin' been near enough to see it I can't say. It was the finished monnyment to Isaac Disraeli, sir, fit for Westminster Abbey. She loved Isaac Disraeli's son like that.' As you listen to this you cannot but call to mind many another story on the same subject equally to the point. Men may dispute as to the value of power and of titles. Looking at the price he has paid for them, in this his desolate evening of life, Lord Beaconsfield may himself doubt their value; but who will deny that the man has been happy who has been so deeply loved?"

XX.

It may be said of Disraeli, as he once said of Peel, that "he is one of the greatest 'members of Parliament' of the present century." There is

no doubt that he has shown himself a great party leader. The qualities that have made him so have been manifold, and have acted in a happy combination. A great lesson of his life has been its illustration of the almost boundless power of indomitable pluck. The patience, the temper, the perseverance, the contempt of reverse, of obstacle, of difficulty, of the most obstinate prejudice with which a man ever had to contend, which his career has betrayed, have made him the irresistible chief of a compact and submissive party organization, which acts not only with the discipline but with the precision and force of an army.

He became a great party leader, not by jugglery, but by the patience with which he awaited his opportunity, by the excellent temper with which he dealt with his colleagues, with the rank and file of his party, and even with his antagonists; by his conspicuous skill in debate, by his power as an orator, by his boldness in timely attack, and by his equal boldness in timely retreat; by his almost invariably wise plan of parliamentary campaign, by his constant encouragement given to the young and promising men of his political connection, and by the almost inexhaustible fertility of his resources in party warfare.

Gladstone became the leader of a united Liberal party; he has managed to divide, distract, and almost destroy it. Disraeli found the Tory party on the verge of chaos, split in two by the

course of Sir Robert Peel on the corn laws. He has given it unity, strength, compactness, and a very palpable and lasting power. Little more can be said for Canning, Grey, Peel, Russell, or Palmerston, or even Pitt, as party chiefs.

"To him," says a close observer, "belongs the honor of having, with an exquisite tact and skill, led the House of Commons, when he had only a minority of supporters at his back, and of having led it in such a way that the most watchful of foes was unable to trip him up, or even to change the secretly-formed purpose of his mind.

"Those who saw him first as Chancellor of the Exchequer, then as Prime-Minister during the last Conservative administration, leading his party and the House of Commons at the same time, witnessed a spectacle the like of which has perhaps never been seen before; for we have no previous record of such generalship as that which Disraeli then displayed.

"The writer, while watching him during that eventful period, was, curiously enough, constantly reminded of a line in Cowper's well-known hymn; for, if ever a man seemed to 'ride upon the storm' of party politics, to be above it, and superior to its fury, it was Disraeli.

"Once and again there was mutiny in the ranks of his own party: as a minister, he could have cried with the Psalmist against his own familiar friend in whom he trusted; opposite to him was

a foe bent upon mischief, superior to him in numbers, and led by a man who, with many great and noble qualities of his own, had never once during a long career been betrayed into the weakness of an act savoring of tenderness toward his brilliant rival.

"From this man Disraeli had to look for nothing but the most uncompromising and relentless opposition—and he knew it. He was himself engaged in a task which, to the most sanguine of followers, had but a short time before seemed an utterly hopeless one, and which to those of them who were unable to see as far as he did, seemed worse than hopeless—suicidal.

"But he went on, in spite of difficulties and discouragements which would have broken the spirit and destroyed the strength of any other party leader of modern times. And he went on with wonderful success. Past rocks and shoals, and quicksands without number, and by a channel on which it had never before entered, he steered the vessel of the state; he faced obstacles which seemed insurmountable, and which to any other man would have been what they seemed, and lo! they vanished under his marvelous manipulation; with a party sorely reduced in strength, he kept at bay the overwhelming numbers of the enemy—nay, he even used them as instruments of his own, and it was by their aid that he passed the great measure which will henceforth be asso-

ciated with his name, and balked his eager rivals. This is what Disraeli has accomplished within the last few years; and no impartial man will deny that it is one of the greatest political achievements recorded in the history of Parliament.

"It was during the trying period between 1866–'69 that he developed his ripest powers. Until he became leader of the House of Commons on the last occasion, he had never shown his remarkable fitness for such a post. On previous occasions, he had done well; but then he did his work superlatively well. It is true that, when he had formerly been leader of the House, he had labored under the disadvantage of having opposed to him the skilled veteran who was the most popular party man ever seated within the walls of Parliament.

"There is but one instance which need be quoted to show that he *does* possess in a very high degree the foresight and the accuracy of judgment which are necessary to make a man a really great statesman. Need we say that we allude to the question of the American War? Upon that topic we were nearly all in the wrong—all but Disraeli. Lord Palmerston—clever, experienced, worldly-wise old man as he was—would have gone in unhesitatingly for a recognition of the Southern States. Earl Russell declared that we saw in the New World that which we had so often seen in the Old—a war on the one side for empire, and

on the other side for independence. Mr. Gladstone was bursting with zeal—even when official restraints ought to have tied his tongue—on behalf of Mr. Davis, and 'the nation he had made.'

"Disraeli was in opposition, and therefore at liberty to act entirely in accordance with his own sympathies; his party were almost to a man the enthusiastic adherents of the South. It would have seemed, to an ordinarily acute person, that the safest and most profitable game he could possibly have played would have been that of the Confederacy. But Disraeli himself knew better. A cool judgment and a clear foresight had led him to see the inevitable end. He was beyond his own party, beyond his colleagues, beyond his rivals, in the prescience which enabled him to see what the results of the American War would be; and, while we believe that this statesman-like sagacity did much to save England at the time from immeasurable evils, we cannot but deplore the fact that those who are put forward as his superiors in statesmanship did not in this instance show that they possessed it in something like the same degree."

XXI.

Closely allied to his unrivaled sway as a party chief, are Disraeli's versatile gifts as a parliamentary debater and orator. In the art of

eloquence he is as full of surprises, of sudden and striking turns, of dazzling flashes and dramatic climaxes, as his public career has displayed in action and conduct.

"Lord Derby," says Ritchie, "has been called the Rupert of debate; but the term is more applicable to Disraeli. When you expect him to speak he has nothing to say; when you do not expect him he is on his legs; when you think he will go on for another hour he sits down as rapidly as he gets up. He delights in surprises, and you cannot tell which is the studied effort and which the impromptu retort.

"As an orator, Disraeli stands by himself. It is not English—that elaborately dressed form; that pale Hebrew face, shaded with curling hair, once luxuriant and dark; that style, so melodramatic, yet so effective; that power of individuality which makes you hate the object of his hate; that passion which you scarce know whether to call malignant or sublime. When he rises it is needless for the Speaker to announce his name. A glance at the orator, with his glistening vest, tells you that the great advocate of the pure Semitic race is on his legs. . . . Immediately you lean forward. In his face there is a dazzling, saucy look which at once excites your interest. You see that if he is not a great man he is an intensely clever one, and you feel that as an orator he has few rivals. When he soars, as he occasion-

ally does, you tremble lest he should break down ; but Disraeli never attempts more than he can achieve, and when nearest to bathos, he saves himself by a happy flight. But even in his highest efforts he aims at a doggedly cool and unconcerned appearance, and will stop to suck an orange, or actually, as he did in his great budget speech, to cut his nails. It is true there are times when he looks more emotional. On that memorable December morning when he was ousted from his chancellorship, when his party were ingloriously driven from the Eden where they had hoped long

'To live and lie reclined
On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind,'

back into the bleak and desert world, Disraeli came out of the House at half-past five A. M., gay and fresh as if the majority had been with him, not against him. There was an unwonted buoyancy in his walk, and sparkle in his eye ; but the excitement of the contest was hardly over—the swell of the storm was there still—still rang in his ears the thunders of applause, audible in the lobby, which greeted his daring retorts and audacious personalities."

Another witness to many of his forensic exhibitions in the House of Commons declares that "no speaker can be more effective than he is in making his 'points.' His by-play, as the actors

call it, is perfect ; and to his sneers and sarcasms he gives the fullest force by the most subtile modulation of his voice, by transient expressions of the features, and the inimitable shrug ; and, while the House is convulsed by the laughter which he has raised at an adversary's expense, he himself usually remains as apparently unmoved and impassive as if he were not an actor in the scene."

"It is the parrot-cry of those who criticise Disraeli's character," says another, "to say that, despite his wonderful genius, he is incapable of appreciating the peculiarities—the weaknesses, if you will—of the character of the average English gentleman. What better answer can there be to this charge, so constantly brought against him, than to point to the way in which he has made himself master of the greatest weakness of the House of Commons—its love of a good laugh? During his premiership, despite all that there was to worry and annoy him, he kept the House of Commons in good temper by his constant use of an unflagging and unfailing humor.

"He put down bores, or he silenced awkward questions, with one of those happy phrases or pleasant jests which Lord Palmerston loved so dearly, and which did so much to smooth the path of that great statesman while he was at the head of affairs. It seems a very small thing, this ability to cope successfully with the bores of the House of Commons ; but no one who has studied

the science of party government will regard it with contempt.

"Disraeli is perhaps never so happy as when he is putting down one of those terrible children of Parliament who *will* know everything, and who *will* ask their questions, or air their most recently-acquired knowledge at the most inappropriate moment. Who, for instance, has forgotten the way in which he met Mr. Darby Griffith, when that honorable gentleman had put a question which looked like 'a poser?'

"Among the bores, Mr. Griffith is, or rather was, *facile princeps;* and at times, by the very perseverance of his boring, he has wormed some secrets out of unwilling governments.

"But when Disraeli, instead of giving him the information for which he asked, got up, and, in that airy, off-hand manner that sits so well upon him, congratulated the member for Devizes upon the possession of a 'luminous intellect,' the House was so delighted with the saying that it gave the minister full liberty to sit down, and leave Mr. Griffith to digest the unexpected compliment—if he could.

"Somewhat akin to this humor is that higher power of sarcasm for which Disraeli has been famous throughout his whole public life. He is not, in one sense of the word, a good debater. It cannot be denied that at times he contrasts unfavorably with Mr. Gladstone. But upon some

subjects he makes speeches which are far above the level reached by any other man in the House of Commons. No one has the power of investing a great political event with more of the interest attaching to domestic affairs than he has.

"Over and over again he has brought down incidents, which were so far above the ordinary level of the House of Commons as to be beyond the reach of its sympathy, to the region of every-day life—as, for instance, in the case of Mr. Lincoln's assassination, when he made *the* speech of all the speeches made the world over upon that most terrible and most touching of tragedies, and brought tears into the eyes of men to whom, before that moment, the President of the United States had been a mere abstraction.

"But, while upon such topics he is a perfect master of words and ideas, when he is speaking upon the mere party question of the hour, he often fails to produce that impression upon his audience which one would expect from a man of his genius. No doubt many causes unite to produce this effect.

"Chief among them, we believe, is the fact that he has not the passion of the ordinary party man. The range of his sympathies is so catholic, that his mind is seldom roused to passion upon a question which is only a question of party ; it is not until he is really touched by one of those few topics which have power to move him deeply,

that the fire of genius in his soul pours forth its sparks, and that he shows all the depths of passion and enthusiasm hidden within him. And yet, even when he is in his coldest mood, what an intellectual treat it is to listen to him speaking upon one of the great questions of the day!

"A few years ago the *Times* contemptuously spoke of his speech on the Irish Church bill—in opposing it upon the second reading—as 'flimsy covered with spangles.' That may have been the impression produced upon the gentleman who wrote the *Times* leader, but we can bear testimony to the fact that it was not the impression produced upon the House of Commons.

"In making that speech, Disraeli labored under many disadvantages—disadvantages so obvious that we need not recur to them—yet his speech was one which drew shouts of applause from those who had least sympathy with the cause on behalf of which he was pleading. From beginning to end it sparkled—with 'spangles,' if it pleases the *Times* to say so—but, at any rate, with spangles the brilliancy of which dazzled the beholders, and roused new admiration within them for the speaker.

"We have made the fullest allowance for a [illegible] which is obvious to those who have studied Disraeli's career in the House of Commons—the fact, namely, that upon many party questions he is not so successful in the effect he produces by

his speeches as might be expected ; but no one will deny that the speeches themselves are among the most remarkable specimens of parliamentary eloquence which the present generation has witnessed. Their cleverness is unsurpassed.

"And even the most jealous of rivals, or the most censorious of critics, will be ready to admit that in sarcasm and in wit he is also unapproached by any politician of the present day. We said that his sarcasm was akin to the humor he shows in putting down bores. It is, indeed, a humorous rather than a venomous sarcasm, bringing smiles even to the faces of those who are wincing under its shafts.

"No one can watch him upon an occasion on which his sarcastic powers are evoked, without being lost in admiration at the skill he displays. He flings about his wonderfully polished epigrams with the careless grace of an Eastern magician flinging knives at one of his confederates—with this difference, however, that whereas the magician always misses, he always hits. He meets a whole broadside of invective with a single thrust of his rapier-like wit, and lo ! his opponent is laid prostrate on the ground.

"He compliments Mr. Beresford Hope when that gentleman is most emphatic in denouncing him, upon 'the Batavian grace' of his style ; he remarks parenthetically, after the most cutting onslaught of Lord Salisbury, that 'the noble

lord's invective possesses vigor, but it has one defect—it lacks finish;' he sends Mr. Goldwin Smith to roam over the world labeled 'an itinerant spouter of stale sedition;' he shuts the mouth of a noisy and demonstrative assailant like Mr. Sergeant Dowse by a passing allusion to his 'jovial profligacy;' and among the leaders of the Liberal party there is not one who has not been made the subject of a happy epigram, polished to the fineness of a needle, which at the time it was tossed across the House with an airy, graceful indifference, never failed to reach its mark, and to strike home. Nor is it only in meeting assailants that he deals in epigrams. The national debt is 'a mere flea-bite;' the Derby is 'the blue ribbon of the turf;' nay, there are a hundred happy phrases now in every-day use among us, for which we are indebted to the leader of the Opposition."

We cannot more appropriately bring this little volume to a close than by quoting the eloquent words of the same writer, casting a rapid eye over Disraeli's whole career, and estimating his fame in England as it will appear in the days when he and his generation shall have passed away:

"He has played a great part in the history of the country, and, on the whole, has played it well; while, as for his personal career, his struggle from comparative poverty and obscurity to the greatest height which it is possible for a subject to attain,

and the qualities which, during that struggle, he has displayed, his resolution and endurance in defeat, his generosity and moderation in victory—these are things for which every man must feel the most genuine sympathy and admiration, whose sympathy and admiration are worth possessing. His career is a romance; but it is a romance that teaches a thousand useful and noble lessons, and that will have power, in times when the party passions of to-day shall be cold as the ashes of those by whom they are fanned, to fire many a young soul with the highest ambition, and to fill many a tender heart with the sympathy for him whose story it records."

THE END.

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